大伝説の勇者の伝説

1 行く先未定の大逃亡

鏡貴也
TAKAYA KAGAMI

富士見ファンタジア文庫

大伝説の勇者の伝説 1
行く先未定の大逃亡

えーと、そうだな。後(あと)ってば頑張(がんば)るとか、元気とか、やってやるぜーとかさ、そういうやる気ありそうな言葉、嫌いだからさぁ……。でも、今はちょっと違うわけだよ。だってさ、あの争い事が嫌いな英雄王さまが、異常になって戦争しかけてたりすんだぜ。非道な人体実験とかしちゃったりしてさ。親友の俺を殺そうとしたり、犯罪者として捕らえたりって、いったいどういうことよ？　それでも、俺はシオンを救うことに決めちゃったから、ちょっとだけ頑張ってみるわ。でも、すぐには無理なんで、とりあえず、この国から逃げ出すことにする。

じゃあ、行こうぜフェリス。

「うむ。だんごを救う旅に出るのだな」

あー、もう、それでいいや——

覚醒する真実の物語。ファンタジー・イノヴェーション、ついに開幕！

イラスト：とよた瑞穂
カバーデザイン：designCREST

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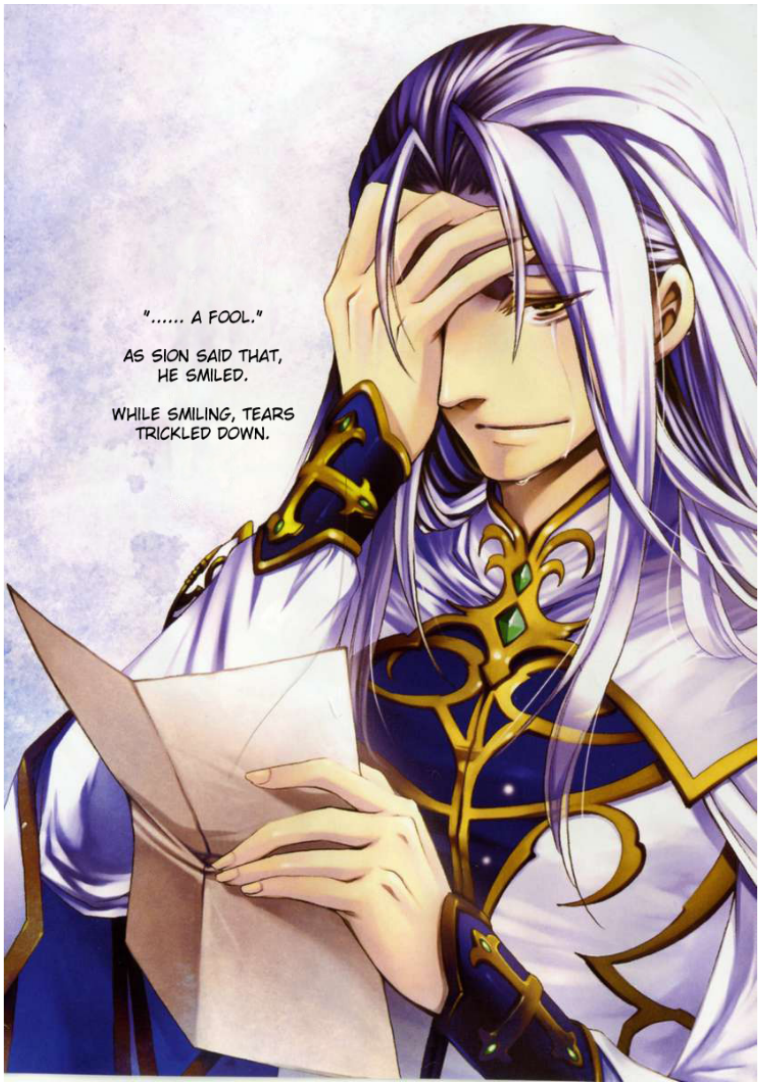
"NOW NOW..... GAZING AT ME LIKE THIS..... YOU'RE AWFUL"
EVEN RYNER WAS 'INSTANTLY KILLED' BY THAT EXCESSIVE SWEETNESS FROM FERRIS.....
大伝説の勇者の伝説1
行く先未定の大逃亡

CROSSING THE MOUNTAINS OF CORPSES,
WHILE THE SOLDIERS WERE MOVING FORWARD,
CLAUGH TURNED AROUND ONCE.
TOWARDS THE DIRECTION WHERE ROLAND WAS.....


"..... A FOOL."
AS SION SAID THAT, HE SMILED.
WHILE SMILING, TEARS TRICKLED DOWN.

Character Introduction

Ryner Lute

Possesses a special type of cursed eyes known as the **Alpha Stigma**, capable of wielding strong magic. Basically a lethargic, unmotivated individual.

Ferris Eris

Ryner's partner. An expert swordswoman with unparallel beauty. Loves dango, a believer of the God of Dango.

Roland Empire

Sion Astal

Originally a prince born of a commoner mistress, the hero who spearheaded a revolution, and the current King of Roland who is well-liked by his people.

Lucile Eris

Ferris's elder brother, the head of the Eris family that for generations has been tasked to serve as personal guard to the King of Roland.

Miran Froaude

Sion's close aide. Works in the shadows, undertakes covert missions and any dark deeds.

Claugh Klom

Grand Field Marshal overseeing the whole of Roland's army.

Noa Ehn

Princess of Estabul which has merged with Roland.

Milk Callad

Ryner's childhood friend, employed in the military.

Kiefer Knolles

Spy for Roland Empire. Currently confined in Gastark.

Riura Luteluu

Self-proclaimed to be the father of Ryner. True identity unknown.

Gastark Empire

Refal Edia

Single-eyed King of the fast expanding Gastark Empire.

Agents of Gastark. Ryner and company had encountered them before.

4-Koma

Right large banner: Super Simplified Legendary Heroes' Legend
Right small banner below: Manga | Toyota Saori

VOLUME 1'S LEGEND
SPECIAL ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY
FOLLOW ME!!
EH—
CLASSMATES SION-KUN AND RYNER-KUN WERE BEST OF FRIENDS
THE CAPABLE SION-KUN BECAME THE KING OF
I'LL MAKE THIS COUNTRY A KINGDOM OF AFTERNOON NAPS!
DURING THE TIME RYNER WAS IMPRISONED
WITH AN AIR OF SUPERIORITY, THE KING GAVE AN ORDER.
GO SEARCH FOR THOSE HEROES' RELICS THAT YOU WROTE ABOUT IN YOUR REPORT.
I WANT THEM VERY MUCH.
LOOKING DOWN FROM AN EXTREMELY HIGH POINT
A STRATIFIED SOCIETY.
SUPER SIMPLIFIED LEGENDARY HEROES LEGEND
MANGA TOYOTA SAORI

Volume 1's Legend
Panel 1:
Banner: Special Royal Military Academy
Right: Classmates Sion-kun and Ryner-kun were best of friends
Sion: Follow me!!
Ryner: Eh ---
Left: Bothersome.

Panel 2:
Right: During the time Ryner was imprisoned
Ryner: I'll make this country a kingdom of afternoon naps!
Left: The capable Sion-kun became the king of Roland.

Panel 3:
Right: With an air of superiority, the king gave an order.
Sion: Go search for those Heroes' Relics that you wrote about in your report.

Panel 4:
Sion: I want them very much.
Ryner: Looking down from an extremely high point ---
Bottom left: A stratified society.

Volume 2's Legend
Panel 1:
Ferris: Let's go Ryner!!! We're setting off on a journey to search for the dango god!!!
Ryner: No ---
Together with partner Ferris-chan, he headed towards Nelpha.

Panel 2:

On the other hand, Sion-kun made a suspicious guy, known as Froaude-kun, his subordinate.
Froaude: His Majesty is mine.
Claugh: What did you say!!
Sion: Now, now.

VOLUME 2'S LEGEND
AND FERRIS-CHAN'S LITTLE SISTER CAME BARGING IN, KEEPING HANDS FULL.
FURTHER-MORE, MILK-CHAN WHO WANTS TO MARRY RYNER-KUN
TOGETHER WITH HIS PARTNER FERRIS-CHAN, HE HEADED TOWARDS NELPHA.
NO
LET'S GO RYNER!!! WE'RE SET-TING OFF ON A JOURNEY TO SEARCH FOR THE DANGO GOD!!!
WAS STOLEN BY SUI AND KUU FROM GASTARK.
IN THE MIDST OF THAT, THEIR VERY FIRST DISCOV-ERED HEROES' RELIC
WHAT DID YOU SAY!!
HIS MAJESTY IS MINE.
ON THE OTHER HAND, SION-KUN MADE A SUS-PICIOUS GUY, KNOWN AS FROAUDE-KUN, HIS SUBORDI-NATE.
NOW, NOW.
WHAT DID YOU SAY?!
YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE RELICS AND YOUR OWN ALPHA STIGMA, HUH.
I'LL HAVE YOU DIE.
THAT FROAUDE-KUN CAME TO KILL PRINCE TOALE, WHO WAS SAVED BY RYNER-KUN.
LIKE HELL I'D KNOW ABOUT THAT!
IGNORANT GUY, HUH.
THAT'S RIGHT. SINCE RYNER DOESN'T EVEN KNOW OF THE DANGO SPECIAL SALE DATE.
BLACKIE!?
POCHI!!?
GO POCHI!!! BLACKIE!!!

Panel 3:
That Froaude-kun came to kill Prince Toale, who was saved by Ryner-kun.
Froaude: I'll have you die.

Panel 4:
Froaude: Go Pochi!! Blackie!! [1]
Shadow beast: Woof!
Ryner: Pochi!!? Blackie!!?

Volume 3's Legend
Panel 1:
Furthermore, Milk-chan who wants to marry Ryner-kun
Milk: Ryner, Ryner, Ryner
Iris: Wild beast, Wild beast, Wild beast
And Ferris-chan's little sister came barging in, keeping their hands full.

Panel 2:
In the midst of that, their very first discovered "Heroes' Relic
Sui: I got the treasure.
Was stolen by Sui and Kuu from Gastark.

Panel 3:
Sui: You know nothing about the relics and your own Alpha Stigma, huh.
Sui's thought: Ignorant guy, huh.
Ryner: What did you say?!

Panel 4:
Ferris: That's right. Since Ryner doesn't even know of the dango special sale date.
Ferris's thought: Ignorant guy, huh.
Ryner: Like hell I'd know about that! #

Volume 4's Legend
Panel 1:
Arriving at Runa, Ryner found his secret child.

Ryner: That's not it! #

Panel 2:

VOLUME 5'S LEGEND
VOLUME 4'S LEGEND
AROUND THAT TIME, IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE MENORIS CONTINENT, THE GASTARK EMPIRE LED BY RIPHAL
EXPANDED THEIR LANDS VIGOROUSLY.
THAT'S NOT IT!
ARRIVING AT RUINA, RYNER FOUND HIS SECRET CHILD.
RYNER-KUN AND GANG WERE ONCE AGAIN OBSTRUCTED BY GASTARK'S SUI AND KUU.
LOOK HERE!
UGH, AGAIN?
RYNER-KUN WAS IN A PINCH!!! BUT, AT THAT TIME
EVEN FROAUDE-KUN CAME BARGING IN.
MERGED THE COUNTRY WITH ESTABUL AND IS INCREASING THE COUNTRY'S MIGHT RAPIDLY.
EVEN THOUGH THE PERSON IN QUESTION DENIED IT. THE BOY HAS THE SAME ALPHA STIGMA, SO IT CAN'T BE WRONG.
MISUNDERSTANDING.
ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS BEST FRIEND, SION-KUN, WHO WAS UNAWARE OF THIS
HAHAHA
AREN'T THEY SUPPOSED TO BE POCHI AND BLACKIE!!?
WOOF!
WOOF!
KILL EVERYBODY!! GO!! TAROU!!! JIROU!!!
SION-KUN, ONCE IN A WHILE, YOU SHOULD REMEMBER THE WOLF WHO BRINGS HIS KID ALONG HIS JOURNEY...
AIM FOR WORLD PEACE!
SHAN

Even though the person in question denied it. The boy has the same Alpha Stigma, so it can't be wrong.
Ferris: Yes.
Ryner: A misunderstanding.

Panel 3

Right text: On the other hand, his best friend, Sion-kun, who was unaware of this
Left text: merged the country with Estabul and is increasing the country's might rapidly.

Panel 4

Sion: Aim for world peace!
Sion-kun, once in a while, you should remember the wolf who brings his kid along his journey.....
Ryner: As I've said, you got it wrong.
Arua: Cha-n

Volume 5's Legend

Panel 1:

Around that time, in the northern part of the Menoris continent the Gastark Empire led by Riphal
Riphal: I shall become the master of Menoris, the king of the world!!
Expanded their lands vigorously.

Panel 2:

Ryner-kun and gang were once again obstructed by Gastark's Sui and Kuu.
Sui and Kuu: Look here!
Ryner: Ugh, again?

Panel 3:

Ryner-kun was in a pinch!!! But, at that time
Even Froaude-kun came barging in.

Panel 4:

Froaude: Kill everybody!! Go!! Tarou!!! Jirou!!! [2]
Shadow beast 1: Woof!
Shadow beast 2: Woof!
Ryner: Aren't they supposed to be Pochi and Blackie!!?

Volume 6's Legend

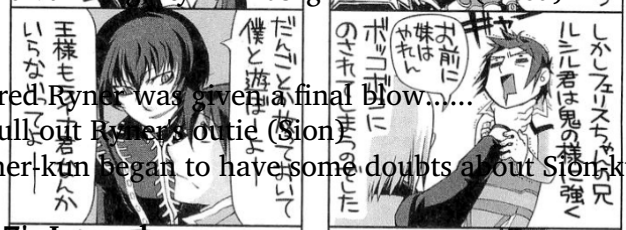
Panel 1:

Ryner-kun
Ryner: Sigh---
Returned to his homeland, Roland.

Panel 2:

Ferris: After having a kid, let's go greet my Nii-sama.
Ryner: It's not our kid, duh--

Panel 3:



But Ferris-chan's Nii-sama, Lucile-kun, was strong like an ogre
Lucile: You did my little sister.
And while burbling, Ryner was 'given a ride' (lifted)

Panel 4:

The injured Ryner was given a final blow.....
Paper: Pull out Ryner's outie (Sion)
Left: Ryner-kun began to have some doubts about Sion-kun.

Volume 7's Legend

Panel 1:

The somewhat lonely Ryner
Tiir: Yah
Made a new friend

Panel 2:

His name is Tiir-kun.
Right Tiir bubble: Ryner-kun looks delicious-
Left Tiir bubble: Ryner-kun's eyes are cute-
For some reason, Tiir-kun was lovey dovey with Ryner.

Panel 3:

Right Tiir: Leave the dango alone and come play with me--
Left Tiir: The king also has no need of Ryner, you know ---

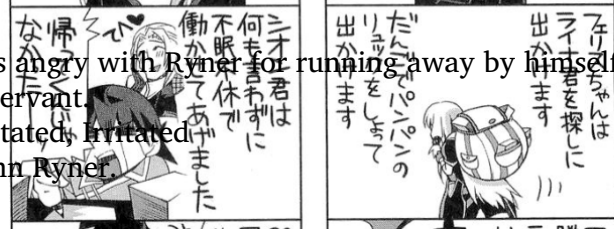
Panel 4:

Tiir picked Ryner up and Ryner went along with it.
Tiir: Where should we go? Karaoke?
The friendship between the two of them, which was thought to be stronger than that with dango skewers, started to crack.

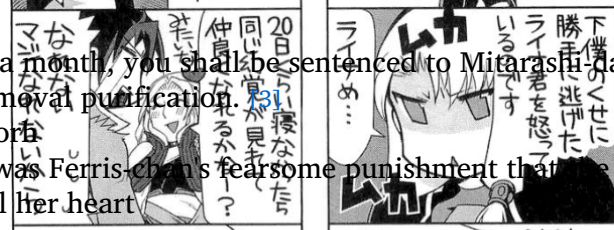
Volume 8's Legend

Panel 1:
Right: After losing Ryner-kun, Sion-kun was very depressed.
Left: But, since Sion-kun is a king, he can't go searching for Ryner-kun.

Panel 2:
Right: Ferris-chan goes searching for Ryner-kun.
Left: She goes with backpacks bulging with dango.



Panel 3:
Right: She's angry with Ryner for running away by himself, despite being her servant.
Center: Irritated, Irritated.
Ferris: Damn Ryner.



Panel 4:
Ferris: For a month, you shall be sentenced to Mitarashi-dango's laziness-removal purification. [31]
Center: Kuorh
Left: That was Ferris-chan's fearsome punishment that she thought out with all her heart

Volume 9's Legend
Panel 1:
Right: There was also Ferris-chan's energetic activities.
Ryner: Yeah, well, bother.....
Left: Ryner-kun returned to Sion-kun

Panel 2:
Right: Without saying anything, Sion made him work day and night without rest.
Sion: Te-he
Ryner: Thought I just came back

Panel 3:
Sion: If you don't sleep for about 20 days, and the same hallucination appears, will we get along, I wonder?
Sion non-bubble: I really want to see.
Ryner: No way. Definitely no way.

Panel 4:
Ryner: Snooze
Ryner non-bubble: Can't take it anymore.
Sion: Huh?

Left: While doing that, Ryner has passed away.

Volume 10's Legend
Panel 1:
Right: The dead Ryner had a near-death experience.
Left: He saw various things.

Panel 2:
Right: Somehow, he came back to life, but kept it a secret from Sion.
Left: Seemingly related to the previous incident, he knew about nothing beyond the mark on his chest.

Panel 3:
Right: Ferris-chan also seemed to have received a sticker from the dango god.
Ferris: Uorhhhhhh
Left: She could feel that she's one step closer to the dango god.

Panel 4:
Right: Having completely forgotten about all that, they went for a check-up.
Left: Somehow, it was very peaceful.

Volume 11's Legend
Panel 1:
But, Sion-kun kept Ryner and gang in the dark about his troubles.

Panel 2:
Right: In order to do that, Sion and Ryner and gang
Left: Were clearly breaking up in discord.

Panel 3:
Right: Will the day when they can laugh together come again...?
Left: The answer shall continue in Dai Denyuuden.

Panel 4:
Ferris: How did you find the chronicles of the dango god?
Center: You there!!!
Ryner: No matter where and how you read ---

Prologue - A Floundering Story

“I love you,” you said.

“That’s bothersome,” I replied.

That was really far from the truth, but since I could not lay hands on you anyway, that was how I responded.

To love someone.

To be with someone.

For someone like me, with stained hands, and a corrupted body, such a thing was unforgivable, I thought.

That’s why I replied, “That’s bothersome.”

As always, on hearing that, your face saddens.

But I thought that was fine.

If this meant causing less pain to you, it was fine.

But, that’s because I also loved you.

As long as I could avoid hurting you, I was fine with being alone. That was what I thought.

That was why I replied, “That’s bothersome.”

In order to run away from your love.

In order to run away from everyone else’s love.

I was running, from one place to another. It was bothersome. Bothersome. Bothersome.

Being near you was bothersome, and as a result I had to run from one place to another.

Even though the truth was that the only person I did not want to hurt was myself. I just used “not wanting to hurt you” as an excuse to run away again and again.

In the end.

I made a mistake again.

Hurting someone important to me.

Losing someone important to me.

Because I never acknowledged my true feelings, you left in tears.

You were hurt.

I did not notice that.

I was only concerned about myself. I only thought about how unfortunate I was.

It was as if I was completely oblivious to you.

And then.

You disappeared.

You disappeared with tears in your eyes.

It was only then that I started feeling regretful.

It was only after losing you that I felt regretful.

How did it come to this? The feelings of regret kept on welling up. They kept on coming.

So, this is a story about taking back what was lost.

A story of me who kept on keeping on, struggling, floundering, to somehow take back what was lost.

No matter how many times.

Again and again.

History kept repeating itself, again and again.

A story about a sad demon, who was struggling with tears in his eyes.

Chapter 1 - The Moment When The World Completely Transformed

“I love you ♡.”

A sudden confession.

“……”

However, Ryner Lute was doing his best to ignore that.

“Heey heey Ryneer ♡ I loove you ♡”

He was told again.

“……”

Like before, Ryner said nothing.

A young man who wished he could sleep for ten thousand years, having black hair and equally sleepy-looking black eyes, Ryner Lute.

Just next to the tall and lean figure with a slightly stooped posture clearly lacking in motivation, came the voice again.

“Hey Ryyyneeer ♡”

What a sweet feminine voice.

“……”

Ryner stubbornly continued to ignore that voice.

To be more precise, he hardly had any time to respond to that lovely voice.

The reason was because, from behind them,

“Hey! Stop right there!”

“Fugitives! Don’t think that you guys can escape us so easily!”

“They are criminals anyway! Let's just kill them!”

The shouting came from dozens of pursuing mage soldiers right behind the duo.

One after another, glowing magical symbols were drawn into the air, and without warning, a hole appeared on the ground where Ryner’s foot had stepped just a split second ago.

“Uwah!?”

BAM! Another hole appeared!

“Waaaaaah!?”

BAM! Another!

“Gyaaaaaaaaa!?”

Ryner yelled out while just barely dodging the successive magical attacks.

“That was bad! That was REALLY bad! If I were a tad slower, my right foot would have been gone……”

BAM!

“Owa owa owa! Hey you guys, don’t you think that using such dangerous magical attacks in the middle of the night is troubling the neighbourho……”

BAM!

“Gyaaaaaaaaa damnnn! You guys have better F***ING remember this!!!”

He was yelling and running at the same time.

Running with every ounce of strength he had.

That was how tense the situation was.

And in that kind of situation.

Following just right behind him was a girl who spoke again,

“Heeey heeey listen to this Ryneeer ~ ♡ I would really love to eat dango ice-cream now ♡.”

“……”

But, as before, Ryner just kept on running without paying any attention to that.

“Seriously ♡ just the two of us running on the streets, it somehow feels like a date, don’t you think ♡”

“……”

“Now, now, Ryyyneeer! You should already be looking at me ♡”

“.....”

“Hey hey hey, why don’t I tell you about how I really feel ♡”

“.....”

“Well, this is actually my secret, you see. I've already reached the point where I can’t live without Ryner ♡ Oh, I’ve gone and said it.....!”

At that instant,

“YOU ARE SO ANNOYINGLY NOISYYY ARGHHHHHH!!”

He reached his limit and turned his head around.

Behind that sweet voice, somewhat contradictory, was an emotionless and expressionless face of a beautiful woman, following close behind him.

The moonlight shone on her long flowing blond hair, and her almond-shaped clear, somewhat emotionless clear blue eyes were gazing intently at him.

She bore perfect features which were beyond ordinary, was blessed with smooth fair skin like that of porcelain, possessing a delicate slender figure, and hanging from her waist where her slender hand rested, which no one would have been able to imagine, was a long sword.

An unbelievably beautiful woman. Anyone who sets their eyes on her would agree she is a woman of unmatched beauty. A beautiful woman who resembles nothing less than a goddess.

When a man receives a love confession from such a woman, it would surely be a heart-stopping moment for him.

Well, he was a little bothered.

“Ah ♡ You are finally looking at me ♡”

He was a little bothered by the words that were repeated by that sweet voice, especially when those words were said by someone with a completely expressionless face.

Even with that expressionless face, the charm she exuded could be felt. She was a beautiful woman.

Ryner looked intently at this expressionless, beautiful woman --- his long-time partner, Ferris Eris.

Though it was not obvious, she appeared slightly embarrassed by his gaze. Her eyes got a little misty. And with a slightly shaking voice,

“Now, now.... don’t look at me like that..... ♡”

That excessive amount of sweetness from her voice, made even Ryner's heart skip a beat.

That being said,

“That unusually meaningless cute act that you are putting on, is REEEALLY pissing me OFFFFFF!!”

In mere seconds, his killing intent towards her rose quickly --- in short, coming to a murderous level.

“Really, what is the matter with you!? What are you trying to do!? Would you please take a look around us! Look, attack magic is coming from the right! Attack magic is also coming from the left! And behind us there’s a ridiculous number of mage soldiers! We are are going to be killed right here! Now now, I have a question for you! In such a situation, what the heck are you trying to do to me?”

In response to such a question, what should normally have been an expressionless face of Ferris was again showing a slight embarrassment accompanied by a slight blush.

“.....it’s precisely because we are in such a situation, that’s why I want to ascertain Ryner’s love for me ♡”

“Huuuuuuuuuh!? That’s why I’m asking you what the.....”

BAM!

“Gyaaaaaa! See! See! This is really not the time for.....”

“But we made a promise to love each other forever.....”

“We did NOOOOOOOOOT! Ugh, what kind of direction is this conversation heading towards.....”

BAM!

“Uhyaaaaaa! Hey, by the way..... why do you seem uninjured in such a situation? What did you do to avoid all that magic?”

Ryner asked, to which Ferris completely ignored as she continued, with slightly dreamy eyes that seemed to sparkle.

“We have been lovers for over ten years.....”

“Yeah, what a lie. Didn’t we meet just a while back, less than two years ago! Where did that ‘lovers’ thing come from, for goodness sake? Seriously, what’s this? What the.....”

That was ignored as well.

“..... Ryner has always been saying this..... *I’ll protect my beloved Ferris! So leave this to me, you go on ahead first.....*”

“So this is where it's leading to, ehhhhhhhhh!?”

Ryner yelled with final comprehension on how the conversation was unfolding, but it was already too late.

All of a sudden, she caught hold of some of his hair together with a part of his clothing from his back, and forcibly turned him around.

Looking at Ferris, who was still putting an act of mild embarrassment, with a slightly flushed face. Ryner, looking as if he was about to cry, protested,

“..... eh, that’s impossible right? To kick the asses of dozens of mage soldiers, such a bothersome thing, even if it is me.....”

Continuing to look embarrassed, she gave him a shy look,

“But, really, I’m truly happy..... about what Ryner said the other night, those words.....”

“..... what words?”

“Don’t you remember..... *Even if I’m roasted by magic, even if I’m sliced up into minced meat, I’ll definitely protect Ferris!*, those were the words...”

“I DID NOT SAY THOSE THINGSSS!! There’s absolutely no way, I would have said such horrifying words!!”

All of a sudden, Ferris returned to her usual expressionless face.

“Now now, that’s why in the case of Ryner Lute, he shall become 'Minced Meat Lute'. It’s meat grinding time.”

“What’s with the meat grinding time! That’s sounds really scary! That’s a joke right? So, that’s a jok……”

However, that was no joke.

Before Ryner could finish his sentence, Ferris made a sweep at his leg, and forcefully grabbed his arm by the joint. And then, with all her strength, she started pulling him towards the direction of the pursuing mage soldiers behind them.

“Wait wait! Please…… wait……”

“Eey!” (sound of effort from Ferris)

“You’ve gotta be kidding me! Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

With a spinning momentum, Ryner was flung into mid-air. The ground and the sky flashed across his eyes.

For a while, Ryner just stared blankly ahead. Then, he turned his head towards the landing ground where he was bounded for.

He saw what was awaiting him there. It was right in the middle of those loud bunch of mage soldiers that were chasing after them.

“……”

Nonetheless.

“……”

Nonetheless, he thought.

“…… Ah…… this is happening again……”

He was already used to it.

He then looked in the direction of Ferris, watching the back of her figure, as she was running away, full of vigor.

“So, what’s going to happen next?”

Without looking back, she answered,

“We’ll meet at the usual place in two hours time.”

Ryner retorted, “Well now, aren’t there like three of those so-called usual places? If you are still fooling around with me, I’ll definitely kill you, seriously you know?” As he said that, he landed head-first.

“Ughhh.”

Groaning like an idiot, he crashed into the ground.

And he was immediately surrounded by the mage soldiers.

“Hahaha. Your comrade has abandoned you. What a pitiful guy!”

“Now there’s nowhere else you can run to, you criminal!”

“Just keep still and let us tie you up!”

While he was being told all that,

“……”

Ryner turned towards them and got up. He made a grunt as he stood up, examined his surroundings, and appeared to consider the seriousness of his situation. Oddly however, there was no sign of any tension from him as he shrugged his shoulders.

“…… well, that line about 'tying me up', isn’t that a little old?”

On hearing that, the man standing right in front of Ryner suddenly flushed bright red.

“Sh… shuddaaaaaap! A criminal has no right to protest!”

“Oh, so that was from you? Did I spoil the mood? If so, I’m really sorry about that.”

The man flushed even redder.

“A… a man with a criminal standing making a fool out of me…… I won’t tolerate this…… I’ve been told from above that it’s perfectly fine to kill you!”

In response to that,

“Really. From above?”

“That’s right! That’s why don’t you dare make light of me. Or I’ll give you a taste of excruciating pain.”

“A taste of excruciating pain..... hmm. Well, I didn’t really have the intention to make light of anything actually.....”

After saying that, he suddenly thought of something the man in front of him just mentioned, and smiled faintly at that.

“.....”

Well, his wry smile was actually blended into a somewhat sorrowful look on his face.

Criminal.

That’s what that man called him.

Criminal.

“..... criminal huh.”

He murmured. He then glanced briefly at the military uniform of the soldier, specifically at the insignia. The insignia, carved into the uniform, was made up of a snake-like shape twirling around a spear.

That was the emblem of Roland Empire.

And Ryner possessed that same insignia.

“.....”

He looked at the clothes he’s wearing. Because of an afflicted wound, he was not wearing his outer garment for his upper body, which was covered in bandages. Otherwise, the outer garment he usually wore, which was currently twirled and tucked around his waist, should bear that very same emblem.

A special cut of a robe weaved into a piece of white armor.

It was a unique type of battle garment specially conferred to only Roland’s mage knight battalion, something which Ryner received from the king of this country, Sion Astal.

Rather, it might be more apt to say that this was something he received from his best friend.

It was given to him before he first started his travels, a particular type of damage-resistant garment that had the ability to withstand even scorching flames.

And of course, the breast area of this particular type of garment had that particular similarity.

"....."

Ryner unfolded the breast area of that garment tucked at his waist. Indeed, there was that very same insignia with a snake-like shape twirling around a spear engraved into that area.

Until just recently, Ryner, Sion, Ferris and their friends had been fooling around, joking, laughing together, and passing the days.

Now, I'm called a criminal.

I'm called a runaway prisoner.

He thought,

"..... somehow."

He thought out loud as he looked around his surroundings. He looked at the mage soldiers surrounding him. He looked at the curtain of darkness from the night around him.

"..... somehow..... the whole world seemed to have changed in just a single moment....."

He then looked at the mage soldier who seemed like the leader of the group, and said,

"So, you've been told from above that it's alright to kill me!"

From above.

That was what the man had said. But, who from above was he referring to? Someone important within Roland's military?

"..... I wonder whether it's Sion."

Ryner murmured.

That's right.

That was how it was regarding his situation.

The directive from the king of this country --- the directive from his best friend, was to brand him a criminal and to have him killed.

"....."

How it had come to this, Ryner was not sure of that himself.

That night from two weeks ago.

It was a rainy night no different from others, when Sion showed up.

For some reason, he was crying.

As he was crying, he asked Ryner to die.

At that moment, the relationship between the two of them ended abruptly.

Just recently before that, we were surely laughing and spending great times together, and then all of a sudden I don't understand what he's thinking anymore.

The figure of Sion crying as he tried to kill Ryner.

Strange black blades coming forth from nowhere. The hand of a woman springing out from Ryner's own chest. And the fading away of the scenery around him. A scene in which he could comprehend nothing.

During that time.

He was standing there alone, enveloped by something resembling a thick shroud of darkness.

But, he spoke nothing of that. He only smiled sadly, and as he was crying, he merely told him to die.

But in the end.

That did not happen.

By the time Ryner regained consciousness, he found himself already imprisoned. Just about anything and everything about this world had changed.

The harshness of the overwhelming transformation of this world was excessive enough to even send Ferris crying.

She told Ryner as she was crying.

Sion had become weird and creepy.

He was laughing like a mad man as he told her that he had killed Ryner.

And that she was not to step into the castle, and show herself before him ever again.

And on top of that, someone who hated wars, someone who hated to see people die, someone who was peace-loving, and that someone, the Hero King Sion Astal, was invading his ally, sending his troops marching into Imperial Nelpha, and appeared to have given the order to kill soldiers, commoners, women, and children without any discrimination.

That Sion.

"....."

That, Sion.

A king who had amassed kingdom-wide popular support.

The appearance of a Hero King.

The appearance of a Hero King who would unite the world. Everything in this world should belong to Roland. That seemed to be what he believed.

Anything that proved as an obstruction, would be removed, killed, and eliminated. That was the state of mind he now had.

"..... really."

Anything that could change would change.

That was what Ryner thought.

And he thought of Sion's face. An image of his best friend appeared in his mind.

But that was a tear-streaked face.

A tear-streaked face with a self-loathing expression.

He was definitely not someone who could laugh as he betrayed his best friend. And definitely not someone who could laugh as he invaded another man's country.

He would always, by himself, frantically shouldering all the heavy burdens which others would find to be endless. In order to hide this from everyone, he would do his best to carry a smile on his face. But in the end, unable to become free of all these burdens, he put on a sad face.

Just like the one he had on that rainy night.

Ryner remembered the pain shown on his tear-streaked face, when he looked as if he was seeking help. The Sion in his memory was way too gentle and hurting inside. He was a sorrowful king.

That was the reason why,

"..... um so, you guys were told from above it's alright to kill me?"

Ryner queried the same man again.

The man laughed,

"Fuhahaha, that's right! So, you're only feeling scared now? But then, I'm not an unreasonable person. If you don't resist, we are fine with apprehending you in a half-dead state....."

Ryner had stopped listening long before that man finished his sentence.

He looked up.

He looked up at the sky.

He turned his head and looked around. He looked in the direction of one of the country's taller buildings.

Roland's castle.

The place where this country's king resided in.

Just some time ago, Ryner, Ferris, and Sion were spending time engaging in meaningless conversations and laughing merrily in that place.

He was looking at that place.

It was a place where he could no longer return to.

Despite not even an hour having passed since escaping from prison, the surrounding area of the castle was already crawling with these many pursuing mage soldiers, it was probably no longer possible to just fight his way back, and arrive at the castle unscathed.

Because the Roland now was no longer the same as before.

“……”

Without the knowledge of Ryner, Sion had secretly completed the vile human experiments, a previously unfinished legacy of the former Roland Empire.

Now, the military boasted ranks of soldiers possessing an abnormal strength, created from the results of such experiments.

Even for Ryner, formerly known as “The Greatest Magician of Roland”, going up against that level of strength might prove to be a dangerously difficult battle.

Right now, the castle was probably protected by that abnormal power.

And it seemed improbable for the Ryner now to overcome that kind of odds and make it into the castle alive.

In other words, it was no longer possible for Ryner to even meet Sion right now.

“……”

Even if his best friend Sion were to be yelling to Ryner for help, that very one thing was beyond his ability right now.

Ryner looked at that very castle,

“Arghhh… damn. It certainly looks far…”

He said in a languid voice.

Moreover, no matter how the man in front of him shouted,

“How dare you ignore what I’m sayingggggggggg!”

Ryner ignored him.

“But even if it’s far...”

He murmured.

However, as of now, even if it was possible to make his way back to the castle easily,

“..... for me to go this far, it’s decided.”

That was what he said.

He grasped the insignia of his clothing.

The emblem of Roland.

The insignia that consisted of a spear with a snake twirling around it.

The very proof of one’s allegiance to this country.

Ryner grasped it strongly, and ripped it apart. Although part of the clothing got torn off together, he did not care. As he vigorously, forcibly, pulled at it, what used to be a damage-resistant piece of clothing that could only be worn by a member of the mage knight battalion, was ripped into shreds.

Ryner stared at the insignia for a while, and threw it away.

“.....”

At that point, his world had undergone a massive change, but no one noticed it.

Because he threw it away a little too quickly.

The emblem.

No one had noticed the fact that he had thrown away this country.

Since young, he had lived in Roland all his life, even though he found everything to be a bother and was a genius of a level which might never appear hereupon again, he was bonded to this place in order to save his friends, again and again.

In order to return to the side of his best friend, he had to do it.

No one had noticed the fact that it was the very first time he threw away his country.

The man said,

“That’s enough. Till the very end, you’re making a fool out of us, if you insist on resisting……”

He was interrupted by Ryner before he finished.

Looking at the man with languid eyes,

“No way. I’m sorry, but that’s not possible.”

He said.

With a shocked expression, the man asked,

“Huh? What’s not possible?”

To that, Ryner, with an idiotic expression,

“No, erm, that’s right. If it’s as usual, it would be kind of different. For me to give my best, to be energetic, to be motivated to do anything, that kind of pumped-up mode is really something I dislike…… *Eh seriously!?* While I’m in the midst saying that, the possibility of you guys catching me, even in a sluggish manner, does exist actually……”

“Well then, so you are not resis……”

But, Ryner shook his head.

“But, today is slightly different, actually. *Let's do it!!* You know, I was kind of thinking along this line, if ever so slightly. But then you know, I never thought that such a troublesome situation in which I hardly have any choice would have arisen…… That’s why, *I’m going to do it!* You see, I was kind of thinking along this line.”

While saying that, Ryner looked up at the castle for another time,

“The unmotivated me is finally going to get serious and do it! Aren’t I great, Sion?”

He said.

But of course, the mage soldiers failed to understand those words,

“What the heck are you saying……”

However, they were interrupted by Ryner,

“As I was saying, you guys won’t be able to catch me, don’t you get it? Do you guys know who I am?”

In response to those words, the mage soldiers looked at each other.

“Who is this guy?”

“And how is it that he’s so full of himself?”

“It can’t be that he’s some kind of highly dangerous guy right……”

The man who looked like the leader started,

“Sh… Shut up shut up! Stop acting so flustered! Don’t be misled by the criminal’s bullshit! Look at that sleepy-faced rascal, what’s there to be fearful……”

But, the leader did not finish his sentence.

To be more precise, he was not in a position to do so as he sailed through the air.

It was not just him alone. One after another, five mage soldiers that were behind him were sent flying as well.

Only then did the rest of the mage soldiers realize that something was happening.

The flying soldiers were all struck by Ryner.

With unbelievable speed, before the mage soldiers even realized what was happening, through a series of strikes and kicks, including the leader of the group, Ryner had sent six mage soldiers flying.

The color of the mage soldiers’ faces changed at this unexpected development.

“What is this guy……”

“K… Kill him. This guys is dangero……”

At that moment, with a swift chopping motion, Ryner hit the back of the neck of the second most important-looking man, the man

who gave that order, and knocked him unconscious. For a group of such level, once the bosses were put out of commission, the rest would be easy.

“V... Vice-commander was taken out as wellllllll!”

See ~

With a floating smile, Ryner broke into a run.

Weaving through the confused mage soldiers who just lost their commanders, he broke free of the group and kept on running.

Immediately after that, one of the soldiers who was probably the third highest ranking among them,

“Don’t let your ranks falter! The enemy, the enemy is just one man! If we all use our magic together, we’ll somehow.....”

As he shouted and started inscribing a magic symbol, Ryner turned his head around.

As he did so, a glimmering vermillion five-point pentacle suddenly appeared over the center of his eyes.

Using those eyes, Ryner briefly studied the unfolding magic symbol that was drawn in mid-air.

At that instant, the power, structure, and the invocation method of the spell the man was casting, were all read in by Ryner’s eyes, and he promptly deployed the corresponding spell cancellation magic.

His hand moved rapidly in mid-air, and with a speed many times faster than that of the mage soldier, he completed his spell.

“WHAT I SEEK IS INTRUSION > > > SHIRA”

At that moment, black smoke was discharged from the magic symbol Ryner inscribed, and came into contact with the magic symbol the man was currently drawing. Consequently, as it was, the appearance of the man’s symbol changed into something that resembled a devil’s face.

In reaction to that, the face of the man changed into an expression of shock.

“What the... what is going.....”

Such a thing should not have been possible.

Just a moment ago, he was, without a doubt, in the process of inscribing the magic symbol, and not only was the structure of his magic being deciphered quickly, a spell cancel was thrown at him, changing the structure of his inscription, for such a thing to happen, what kind of monster……

The man looked at Ryner's eyes.

The center of Ryner's eyes.

Right after seeing that vermillion five-point pentacle in the center

of his eyes, all of a sudden, the man stiffened in fear.

“It... It’s **Alpha Stigmaaa**!! This guy is an **Alpha Stigma** monster!!”

Upon uttering those words, a mild confusion started to arise among the mage soldiers.

Alpha Stigma.

Such a level of disgust, fear, and loathing were embedded in those words.

The eyes that can read in all forms of magic.

However, once the bearer of these cursed eyes goes berserk, regardless of living or non-living, friend or foe, he will start destroying and slaughtering everything around him.

The mark of attestation to a mad monster.

Just as one thought, the mage soldiers looked at Ryner’s eyes and started shaking in fear.

“Mon... Monster!”

Ryner smiled wryly at that.

“..... there’s no need to be so afraid of me..... but then again, if that would make you give up on chasing after me, do become even more fearful ～”

In response to those words, several mage soldiers started fleeing, shouting how they were going to be killed by a monster.

“.....”

Ryner made a slightly sad expression for a moment and sighed.

He took a deep breath.

And then,

“..... Errrmmm, ora ora ora! If you don’t want to get killed by an **Alpha Stigma** monster, get away from here nowwwwwwww!”

He yelled with all his strength.

This time round, the majority of the mage soldiers started fleeing.

Looking at the scene before him, Ryner thought it fortunate to have invoked his **Alpha Stigma** this early.

But the truth was Ryner originally had a plan.

After being thrown into prison by Sion, and breaking out of prison with the help of Ferris, it appeared that they had been discovered for the mage soldiers were lying in wait for them, and somehow they had managed to escape to this particular street with all their might.

However, the truth was it was easy to shake off these guys.

Rather, to put it more accurately, it was no difficult matter for both him and Ferris to fight them off.

But, the fact was they fled all the way to this street.

What was the reason behind that?

The original plan was to first lure the mage soldiers, who thought they could win against the likes of Ryner and Ferris, to this street and then lose them. After they were shaken off, the mage soldiers would probably continue searching for them for some time while they were under the impression that they could win against them.

In that case, the mage soldiers were unlikely to call for reinforcements at this point in time, delaying the possibility of having more powerful troops or even the activation of the royal military. That was the original plan.

However, the plan failed.

All thanks to her.

All thanks to that stupid Ferris.

It was all thanks to that rampaging, trouble-causing, dango-fanatic woman, that I have to end up fighting these mage soldiers.

They were definitely not weaklings. If Ryner were to fight them for real, there was definitely a need for him to be somewhat more serious.

If that happened, it might lead to some casualties.

Now that he was about to leave the country, he wished to, as much as possible, avoid injuring his former comrades.

“Well, seems like I’ve already hit some of them……”

On top of that, Ryner was afraid that those soldiers who fled would probably call for more reinforcements.

If that happened, more powerful assassins were bound to come after them.

He originally wanted to buy a little more time for them to finish their preparations to leave the country.

“Oh well, it can’t be helped…… now, incidentally……”

One of the mage soldiers who was attempting to run away had been caught by a quick movement from Ryner.

That man who was caught seemed unbelievably frightened,

“Mon… monster… let go of m… me……”

“What the…… isn’t that a little excessive……”

“I’m going to be killed…… I’m going to be killed by a monsterrr…”

The wail of despair caused Ryner to grimace.

Monster.

He had always being called that. Always.

Monster.

MONSTER.

M-O-N-S-T-E-R.

After being repeatedly branded as a monster, and incurring a harsh emotional hurt, in the end, he had given up on anything and everything, and had given up on coming into close contact with other people.

Because he bore a defiled body, he had no right to love another person.

Because he bore a cursed body, he had no right to stay by the side of another person.

With a sense of resignation, he gave up on anything and everything..... that in itself was an easy and comfortable way out.

In exchange for not hurting others, he put himself in a place where he himself would not get hurt.

In exchange for not betraying the hopes of others, he put himself in a place where he could do things half-heartedly.

Though that place was dark and lonely, it was a place of ease and comfort.

And yet, the person who pulled him out from that place, that place of darkness, was none other than Sion.

After meeting him, then meeting Ferris, and doing stupid things with them, for some reason, before he knew it, he was no longer bothered when others called him a monster.

As they were doing stupid things and laughing merrily together, before he realized it, his heart had opened up, and he no longer needed to bear the feeling of being alone anymore.

Despite all that, Sion had told Ryner to go back to the way he was before.

Having told me to follow him in a pompous manner, without telling me anything, shouldering everything by himself, and saying sorry to me.

But it shouldn't have been like this.

That was a little too irresponsible of him.

Ryner thought.

"Hey you, I need you to pass a message to Sion."

"I'm going to get kill....."

"Stop that already."

Ryner's intimidating tone stopped the flow of his words. The man seemed about to cry.

However, Ryner just smiled faintly.

“Listen to this. I’m not going to kill you. But, I need you to pass a message to Sion... to the king of this country.”

In response to this, the man glared at him,

“Y... You filth, a message from a criminal like you, His Majesty will never hear of.....”

To which Ryner interrupted,

“Hear me. He is really a wimpish person, and there is no way he would ignore this. Anyway, it’s fine even if he doesn’t want to hear of it. I just wanted to let him know I’ll be leaving the country. He can do as he pleases.”

“Who would pass a message for a monster like you.....”

“Aye. That’s fine as well. But, you will pass the message. Well, this is how it goes. I.....”

After making his request, Ryner then released the man.

The man glared at him,

“I’ll not pass on the ramblings of a criminal!”

He shouted loudly. Well, if that was the case, that was fine in itself. Whether the message was passed on or not, how he was to proceed from now on was already decided.

He shrugged his shoulders, smiled faintly, and said,

“Well, thanks a lot for the trouble.”

“Shut up! You monster.....”

“Yeah yeah. Now, I think that would be enough. Most of your comrades have completely fled, you know.”

“.....”

Even after having said that, the man continued to glare at Ryner for a while before taking off.

After gazing at the back of his fading form for a while, Ryner turned

around on his heel.

“Arghhh... for goodness sake, after this, there will surely be more and stronger pursuers coming after us..... we have to finish our preparations and get out of the country before that I guess.....”

While muttering to himself, he started walking.

The first destination was the ‘usual place’ where he should link up with Ferris however.

“.....”

At that thought, Ryner stopped in his tracks.

“But then again, which usual place was she referring to.....?”

He wearily shook his head in puzzlement.

♦

That place.

“.....”

That place was terribly dark.

To put it more accurately, though the absence of illumination was the real cause of the darkness, Sion Astal thought that it was terribly dark.

In the castle of Roland Empire, Sion was sitting alone on his throne surrounded by a large amount of empty space.

Actually, since the start of Roland’s invasion of Imperial Nelpha, in order to pass down various orders, the time Sion spent in this spacious room had increased.

Even though either his subordinates or the nobles would call on him one after another, turn by turn within short intervals, Sion thought that the room was dark and lonely.

He looked at the huge windows lining the left and right of his room.

The sky was already starting to brighten, indicating it was about time for the morning visits.

The sunlight started streaming through the windows into the room, and furthermore, given that the room was lit by magical illumination, it was actually in truth far from being dark.

“……”

The darkness was caused by this country.

That was what the king who just turned twenty not long ago thought.

Bearing silver hair that has a regal feel, he has sharp, golden eyes that speak of an indomitable will.

With those eyes, he is always looking far into the future.

The future of this country, the future of the people, the future of the world.

What are the things that can be done to bring forth more changes to this world.

He looks far into the future, makes the decisions, and moves forward.

That’s right.

He is the hero king that everyone had been waiting for.

He is the benevolent lord who remade the formerly corrupt Roland Empire into a strong and prosperous major power standing in the south of the continent.

And this all happened within the span of two years since he became king.

During the previous war with Estabul, he rose through the upper ranks quickly due to his remarkable achievements despite of his illegitmate heritage as the son of the previous king and a commoner. After that, he used everything he had - his skills, looks, and charisma - to overthrow the king by acquiring the people's support.

But he had not stopped at that.

Reforming the old practices of the country, he put the tyrannical nobles in their place, eliminated waste, brought prosperity to the country, and kept on moving forward. Moving forward. Moving forward.

It was almost as if part of his life was seeping away, even though he looked like a man who was slowly losing his sanity, he continued moving forward.

Always searching for the best option.

Always searching for a way that would save the most people.

What is the best method?

Which is the most correct path?

Even when he felt troubled, shed endless tears, and felt despair, he still believed that would be a better tomorrow and kept on moving forward.

Without a doubt, the people were rejoicing.

At the appearance of someone who was like a beacon of light for them.

At the dawning of a light that shone across this world of madness, every single person in this country was rejoicing.

Everything would be fine, as they believed that they could leave everything to him, Sion Astal.

It was because he is the hero king.

He is perfect because he is the light of this country.

Therefore, he will never make a mistake.

It is not possible for him to make a mistake.

Everyone believed so.

And Sion continued to fulfill their expectations.

To look far into the future, and continue moving forward without making any mistakes.

The path which is the most efficient, the most correct, and with the least sacrifices.

That was the reason why he continued those human experiments to create a powerful army.

Because it was necessary.

To minimize the loss of lives of the ordinary commoners, there was no other way than to acquire a power that could easily overwhelm another country.

“.....”

It was the same with betraying and invading former ally, Imperial Nelpha.

It was necessary.

To expand and strengthen Roland, to a level where it can be an intimidating force to other countries. It was the same with former ally Nelpha. In the midst of an internal conflict that arose within the court of Nelpha, an anti-Roland faction was born, attempting to seize political power within the country. If Roland did not initiate the preemptive invasion, someday, it would have been the one invaded.

If that's the case, it was better to make the first move, and make it a thorough one. In order to deter other countries from opposing Roland. In order to make them think twice before waging an unproductive war.

He will show it to them.

By doing so, it might be possible to avoid any more meaningless wars from now on. It might be possible to bring an end to the meaningless loss of lives.

To achieve that, a massacre was necessary.

Roland’s army was now on its way to conduct a large-scale massacre in Nelpha. The order was given to show no mercy even towards surrendering troops. Even towards women, even towards children. The order was to spare no one.

To strike fear into other countries.

They shall all watch in fear. In order to make sure that none would ever dare to defy Roland again, the order was to completely crush them.

“……”

In order to show the might of this country, those orders were given.

“……”

Because by doing that, from now onwards, it might be possible to greatly reduce the loss of lives.

Because by doing that, if the desire to oppose Roland was lost, it might be possible to avoid another war.

This was a fair trade.

To sacrifice less to save more.

“……”

The people were supportive. They were enthusiastically screaming about showing Nelpha and showing the world Roland’s might.

Well, that was all due to his manipulation……

“……”

And now, he chose again.

The right path.

The path with the least sacrifices.

Even if the path was a thorny one, he was determined to step on the thorns and carry on.

He will move forward.

He will move forward.

Every step he took forward, he bled. As he forced his way through the thorns, he suppressed the urge to scream out. He suppressed the urge to cry. He suppressed the urge to shout out that he wanted to quit, that he wanted to stop moving forward.

And in the end.

“……”

In the end, even his friend.

“……”

He chose to sacrifice even his best friend.

“……”

Because that was also absolutely necessary.

Because in order to move forward, that was necessary.

“……”

Sion shut his eyes and opened them again. He stared at the emptiness in front of him. There was nothing there but emptiness. Rather, he could feel nothing except for emptiness.

Ever since he parted with him, the room --- the world felt like empty darkness.

The days spent with Ryner.

Together with him and Ferris, the trio spent their days laughing merrily like idiots, doing meaningless things and exchanging blows with one another……

Those days seemed to shine brightly in his mind.

In the end he lost them all, even though he knew that he was immersing himself in a fictitious dream, that was what he wished for.

“……”

However, he had lost them all.

When he opened his eyes, it signaled the end of his dream.

It’s time to move on.

Because even if he had experienced losses, despair, and regrets, time will move forward.

Because to proceed into the future, he had to push himself onward.

Losing something, again and again.

Because even if he's unwilling, even if he shouted 'I don't want to', he had to push himself onward.

Therefore, he moved forward.

In order to acquire something new, even if he was not entirely convinced it's something better than that from before……

He abandoned his past, threw away what's important to him, and moved forward while crying loudly.

In order to seize the future, the light in front of him.

He is that kind of king.

A king who always continues moving forward.

Even if he knows that what lies in front of him is merely emptiness for himself, he will move forward……

At that moment,

"…… do you regret it?"

He was asked in that manner.

Suddenly a voice reverberated from within the emptiness in the room.

It's Lucile.

Lucile Eris.

The head of the Eris swords clan that, for generations, has been tasked to protect this country's king from the shadows.

Rather, it may be more accurate to say that he is an abominable god who sees everything in this country……

"…… regret?"

Sion replied.

Regret.

It's not possible not to have any. Whether it was better to do it in that way or in this way, every matter and everything, from large to small, there were many a times when he wanted to die.

If only he was stronger. If only he was wiser. Then his mother would not have died. His friends would not have been killed. Kiefer would not have cried. He would have been able to protect Ferris.

And Ryner.

"....."

He would not have betrayed Ryner in that manner.....

A smile floated on Sion's face.

"Regretful about what?"

Lucile laughed.

"Haha. That's promising."

"Is that so?"

"You are really splendid."

After saying that, all of a sudden, Lucile materialized before Sion from out of nowhere.

Bearing blond hair, and a pair of closed eyes.

And with a face that is beautiful beyond ordinary.

Since he is Ferris's elder brother, he should resemble her in likeness, but when Sion looked at him, he could hardly feel any form of resemblance between the two of them.

Though they have the same hair color, the same facial features, and the same beauty, Ferris and Lucile were two completely different individuals. Lucile carried within himself a being of demonic nature.

Rather, in that sense, he is no longer a human being.

Sion gazed at Lucile.

"It is indeed an honor to be praised by you."

“Don’t I always commend you?”

“Is that so?”

“That is so.”

“Hmm. Well, I must have been ignoring all that. Probably because it didn’t really make me particularly happy.”

“Ah, that’s kind of terrible.”

Lucile smiled again. However, the smile seemed to carry no emotion. None whatsoever. A kind of fearful vast nothingness exists within him.

Sion, while gazing at the nothingness, said,

“I’m serious. Since the truth is I don’t really feel happy to be praised by you.”

In response to that, as a faint smile floated on Lucile’s face, he said,

“That’s a pity. As expected, it seems like I can’t take the place of Ryner-kun.”

“……”

Sion couldn’t respond to that.

Nonetheless, Lucile continued.

“However, I truly think that you are a splendid king. In spite of the **Power** that is devouring you from within, the fact that you can still retain your own will, that in itself is amazing. The previous king --- your father who was promptly taken over by the **Power** --- lost his sanity……

But at that juncture,

“He was no father of mine.”

Sion said.

Lucile shrugged his shoulders at that reaction.

“Right. You’re probably right. He wasn’t exactly the person that you would acknowledge as a father. Even though the same blood flows

in you both, existing as a lowly puppet, he was in a different league from you. The same goes for your brothers. That's why I'm grateful to you. For the fact that in my generation, I was able to meet a colossal vessel like you..... for discovering the vessel that I was supposed to choose. Your mother was great, wasn't she? Your mother who was a lowly commoner labeled as a dog, and beyond my expectations, was stronger than....."

At that,

"..... silence."

Sion said.

And Lucile stopped. He then smiled faintly and continued again,

"..... in any case, you are truly splendid. Because even if you have any regrets, stricken with despair, you'll surely, without losing your sanity, choose the right path."

Sion looked intently at Lucile's beautiful smiling face.

"..... you showed yourself just only to say that?"

Lucile smiled.

"Not really."

"Well what is it then?"

At his question, Lucile, for once, turned his head to look in the direction of one of the windows in the room. From that window, one can see the streets below the castle. He looked intently in that direction for a while before turning back around,

"Ryner-kun has escaped."

Sion's eyes widened at that. That's impossible. The prison that Ryner was sent to, it was definitely not one from which he could have broken out, even assuming his allies..... even if Ferris was the one to help him in the jailbreak, there was no way she could penetrate through the strength-enhanced guards all by herself.....

As if reading his thoughts, Lucile started.

"By the way, the entire strength-enhanced guards were wiped out. It was all set up by Duke Lieutolu....."

“Kun!”.

Sion groaned.

Duke Lieral Lieutolu.

That was the name of Ryner’s father. He was a noble who was supposed to be dead. Someone who used to maneuver this country from the shadows, a dead legacy of Roland.

He is a monster who can match up to Lucile.

“..... he did something unnecessary.....”

Lucile laughed heartily at Sion’s reaction.

“Haha. That’s true, he really did something rather unnecessary there. You even went out of the way to conduct research on Ryner-kun, in order to find a way to save him without sacrificing him..... already more than ten people were killed during the human experiments for that sole purpose..... now that he is taken away, all your efforts have gone to waste.....”

“Silence.”

“On top of that, since the other side also has the intention of saving Ryner, it’s really a pity. Perhaps, from your perspective, it’s better for Ryner to be living his life with vigor the way he used to before you took away his freedom and made him a sacrifice.....”

“Silence!”

“And this must have been within your expectations. That’s why I said you are a splendid king. In spite of feeling troubled, distressed and straying from your path at times, in the end you’ll return to the rightful path and it’s all due to the fact that you can see very far into the future, and will never embark on a path of mistakes. Things like saving your friends, or helping the people in front of you, you can’t do it if it will lead you to a path of mistakes. Eventually, you’ll lose sight of the important things.....”

“I said silence!”

Sion shouted loudly.

Lucile opened his eyes and stared at Sion. His clear blue eyes looked straight at him, as if he could completely see through the depths of

his heart.

And he smiled.

As if he was making a fool out of him.

As if he was taking pity on him.

Smiling lightly.

Then Lucile said to him.

“..... what is the matter, Sion? The ‘silence’ just now, compared to the level of ‘silence’ when I was bad-mouthing your mother, was much harsher, don’t you think?”

"....."

“..... or is it that you don’t want to be seen by him? The you who is a murderer. The you who conducts human experiments. The you who have lost his humanity, you won’t want him to see you like that, isn’t it? That’s the reason why you became so agitated.”

“.....”

And then Lucile smiled again.

“It’s fine even if you don’t feel like answering. Well..... what do you want to do now? Are you going to let Ryner-kun escape after all?”

But Sion, without facing him, replied.

“..... I won’t allow that to happen.....”

“Well, it doesn’t really matter to me one way or the other. However, what you’re doing is pointless, Sion. Even if you keep conducting those human experiments, you can’t create another ‘him’. But well, it’s of course a different story if he dies..... but you can’t lift your hand to kill him as well. The thing you never can do.....”

Lucile stopped there. He looked intently at Sion and smiled faintly.

“..... you are aware of this as well. And you’ve already made your choice. To sacrifice him. To drop him into the sea of eternal despair. That would be the most efficient way. But you still fret. In a meaningless way. Really, you still retain some sort of humanity..... even though in truth you are hardly a human being

right now..... it is indeed a magnificent thing that you still retain some semblance of humanity in what's left of you. It's fine then. Do whatever you want. I've told you this before, didn't I? The choices taken by the **Hero** will never be wrong. You will always do the right thing."

After saying that, Lucile vanished again.

His form, his presence, his entire existence had disappeared. However, he's still there. Sion knew that for a fact. Thus,

"Lucile."

He queried.

As expected, there was a response.

"What's up? Sion."

And Sion once again reiterated.

"..... I definitely won't allow that to happen."

"Ahaha. You've said that earlier. And that's fine. Having come so far..... since you have already come so far..... after all I can't rise above the sword of the **Hero** inside you, feel free to use me as you please. Feel free to use your power as you see fit. Will you sever the darkness from the world? Or will you stop the flow of life? I have absolutely no idea which choice you would take."

That was what Lucile said.

Sion looked intently at the empty space from which Lucile disappeared.

Sever the darkness from the world?

Or on the contrary, stop the flow of life?

"..... I....."

He started.

"..... I....."

At that moment, a man entered the room.

A man whom Sion used to pass down orders to the military, a military messenger. Normally, if he appeared on his own volition, it meant that something must have happened at the frontlines with Imperial Nelpha.

“Your Majesty.”

The man knelt before Sion.

Sion acknowledged him with a nod and said,

“Rise.”

“Yes sir.”

“Well, did anything crop up at Nelpha?”

He shook his head.

“No sir, this is something from within Reylude……”

Though not as expected, at the very least, Sion was well aware that the man came to report something important.

Reylude is the name of the capital of Roland. In other words, he came to report about something that was happening in the streets below this castle.

In other words,

“…… Ryner Lute?”

“T… that’s right sir.”

“He escaped?”

“Yes. I’m so sorry sir.”

“There is no need for you to apologize. So, because Ryner kicked the asses of the guards and ran away, you’ve come to request for reinforcements, is it something along those lines?”

But the messenger shook his head again.

“The reinforcements were also……”

Sion raised his eyebrows with a start.

“They were repelled as well?”

“Yes……”

“You mean the pursuing troops were already sent out without even reporting the matter to me?”

“…… yes sir.”

“Who was it? Who was the one who gave the order?”

“It was Major Rahel Miller.”

“…… Miller?”

The name brought a bitter smile to Sion’s lips. The man called Miller, who stayed in the shadows during Sion’s revolution, was actually the mastermind behind the revolution.

He is someone known to be a cut above the rest, possessing a sharp and keen mind, and is able to maintain his calm and composure at all times.

When Sion first met Miller, his preparations for the revolution were almost complete. Whether it was regarding gathering of necessary talent, amassing support from the people, or gathering of intelligence on the nobles that had to be defeated.

And according to Miller’s plans, the revolution happened swiftly.

The world changed.

This is the man who has truly earned the right to stand at the top of the military in this country.

However, he is not one who desires to rise to the top ranks of this country. Stubborn as he is, he has chosen to stay at a lower ranked position and protect this country in his own way.

This is a man who can move without Sion’s permission. He was the one who sent troops in pursuit of Ryner.

Nonetheless……

“What did Miller say?”

Sion asked. And the messenger replied.

“Capture the runaway prisoner, whether dead or alive……”

Whether dead or alive……? In other words, it’s okay to kill him.

However, the troops he sent out were completely defeated. Miller, who in spite of being well aware of Ryner’s strength, had sent out troops that could be defeated by Ryner.

What is the reason behind it?

“……”

Sion thought.

His decision to send out his troops was definitely to delay the reporting of the jailbreak.

If the jailbreak had been reported promptly, there would have been sufficient time to take the necessary counter measures. However, Miller had delayed the report, providing Ryner with extra time to make his escape.

But even if that was so, what can Miller gain by allowing Ryner to escape?

Even though I have sources of information telling me that Miller and Ryner were acquainted in the past, that is not enough reason to have let Ryner escape. Miller is simply not that kind of man.

He isn’t one who would be swayed by emotions to make a meaningless move.

If so, why?

“……”

After some consideration, there were two possibilities.

The first was that in order to discover why Sion was so obsessed with Ryner, he had to ensure that Ryner remain alive.

Another possibility was that he already knew about Sion and the **Mad Hero**, and that in order for the **Mad Hero** to be completed, Sion, or rather the **Mad Hero** himself, had to devour Ryner as a sacrifice.

It was probably the former. Even if Rahel Miller had been known as

a genius, to acquire the knowledge on the latter seemed unlikely.

As of now, in this country, the only people who knew of the changes taking place inside of Sion were Sion himself, Lucile, and Froaude.

On top of that, in Lucile's house, with their nerves in shreds, and safe-guarded in darkness, were Sion's brothers, or what's left of them. However, they were deemed as unfit by Lucile, and had never since regained consciousness.

In other words, only three people in this country should possess knowledge of Sion's true form. And all three of them would definitely keep this in confidence.

That would mean that in order to uncover what Sion was hiding, Miller would have to capture Ryner alive.

So, that's what it meant.

If that's the case, there was no need for Sion to take any counter-measures. All he needed to do was to explain things to Miller.

The reason behind Ryner's imprisonment.

The reason behind the continuation of those human experiments.

The reason.

"....."

The reason why it's imperative for Sion to throw away his humanity.

All he needed to do was to explain those things.

The distortion and the competitive struggles that plagued this world.

And also.

The true form of the mad goddesses.

Miller should be able to understand then. And he should be cooperative then. If he is willing to accept a promotion to the

higher ranks, he might even become a greater aid to Sion.

That in itself would solve the problem of Miller.

What was left was Ryner himself.

It was imperative to capture Ryner alive, but who possessed the capability to undertake such a task……

At that moment, the messenger spoke again.

“Erm……”

Sion stopped him before he could say anything else.

“It’s fine. I’ve already understood the issue with Ryner, and that of Miller, I would deal with……”

But the messenger shook his head.

“N… no, that’s not it. The reason why I came here……”

“Hm?”

Sion lifted his head. And looked at the messenger. For some reason, he was having a puzzled expression.

“What’s the matter?”

As Sion asked, he took out an envelope from his breast pocket.

“…… Well…… I’m not exactly sure whether it’s alright to deliver such an absurdity to Your Majesty but.”

“Uhn?”

“There is a message from the criminal to Your Majesty……”

At that moment.

Sion instantly broke out of his thoughts. His vision seemed to blank out for a moment, and he felt as if his blood was drained away from him.

“…… a message from Ryner?”

Acknowledging Sion’s question, the messenger nodded.

Sion was unable to move a muscle at that.

Terrible.

Sion had betrayed Ryner in an unsightly, and most terrible manner.

Always wearing the face of an ally. Always wearing the face of a friend. While saying things like *come together with me, I'll protect you*, in the blink of an eye, he had went back on his words and turned against him.

He could still remember Ryner's face at that time.

That half-smiling face. That expression of loneliness, as if he was about to cry from a sense of hopelessness, but in the end he held back those tears.

Sion told Ryner that he would kill him.

But still, he called Sion his best friend.

Sion told Ryner he would betray him. But still, he told him, "*I won't give up on you, until I save you, I will not die*".

"*No matter where I'll be, I'll bring you back to the way you were*".

Even though I've told you it's all over. Even though I've told you I'm going to betray you.

When did you start acting like an idiot, making such a serious face, and desperately reaching out to me shouting, "I'll never give up, I'll definitely never give up".

"..... Come with me, Sion."

Ryner's words resounded in his mind.

At those thoughts, Sion seemed about to cry. He seemed about to yell out. *Why am I here? Why is it that the world is always, always, such a cruel place.* He seemed about to yell out.

In spite of that, in spite of that, Ryner wanted to save me.

But still.

What I did do in return to him?

Without being able to save you, unable to avoid killing you, selling you to eternal darkness. Selling my best friend, and moving forward.

Forward, forward, forward.

And yet, I've betrayed him in every possible way, in order to move forward.

"....."

And now, before him, there was a message from Ryner.

No, if he didn't do that.

"....."

If he didn't do that, he wouldn't be able to stand it.

That was what Sion thought.

"....."

The messenger moved closer to hand over the envelope. And Sion took it.

The messenger said.

"The mage soldier who was caught by Ryner Lute, wrote down the verbally transmitted message from him. Of course I did not read it. And anyone else for that matter..... only because, according to that mage soldier..... *no matter what, it is better to pass this message directly to His Majesty*, those were his words....."

Sion opened the envelope.

He started reading what was written on a piece of paper taken out of that envelope, but he stopped in the middle of it.

And then,

"You may leave for now. I'll call for you again later."

"Yes sir."

The messenger lowered his head again, and left the room.

After waiting for the messenger to exit, Sion quietly took a deep

breath. In order not to have his own emotions waver. In order not to fall prey to his own weakness and stray from his intended path again.

Sion inhaled and then exhaled.

And then brought his eyes back to the letter.

Where the following was written.

Eh ~ the thing is ~ how do I say this..... ah there are already so many words? The message hasn't started yet? Don't stop writing.

Eh ~ alright, To Sion-sama.

Ah, you can drop the sama I guess. Ah, wait a minute. You've already written that, rewrite it.

Erm... yeah. Cough cough.

Alright.

To stupid Sion.

It's embarrassing to speak formally, and since it's troublesome as well, I'm going to go with casual form. Casual okay?

Erm... what I want to say is, well in other words, this is how it goes.

For me, you know, how do I say this. I've been dead since a long time ago. Even though I'm alive, I'm actually dead. I'm a monster, you see, a monster who is only capable of hurting people, I can't have anyone remain at my side, I can't love anyone, thus there is no real meaning in my life. I'm always thinking about such things, you know, and have long since given up on everything.

That's why despite being alive, I'm actually dead at the same time. Living my meaningless life sluggishly, 'yaaawn', that kind of feeling. Yawning every day, thinking whether I'm better off dead, hmm what is this, what am I saying here? Well, it doesn't matter if it sounded strange.

Anyway, this is what I want to say.....

That, that, in other words.

I'm..... you know, saved by you.

From the depths of my heart, you've saved me.

I've always..... I've always been grateful to you, you know.

I think I want to return that favor.

I've always been pondering on how to go about doing that.

That's why even though I'm not exactly sure what kind of trouble you may be embroiled in, I'll be coming over to where you are.

Didn't I tell you on that rainy night? I would never give up on you. I meant it. That's why, in order to save you, I'll be coming over to where you are.

I'm going to save you.

In order to do that, I'm starting to feel somewhat motivated.

In order to get rid of my past unmotivated self, a brand new me has been born! I'm going to do it --- I'm shouting at your castle, you know? Are you laughing right now? Can you hear me? Well, it's probably going to snow tomorrow. [4] *Yep.*

Boring jokes aside, right now I'm thinking of coming over to where you are.

I'm not sure what kind of power I need in order to accomplish that, but regardless of that, I will get my hands on every single bit needed to come over to where you are.

So until then, prepare yourself and wait for me.

Because at that time, I'll make you regret not killing me.

You.

The willful you who decided to wallow in misery alone, shouldering everything, making that crybaby face, I'll be coming over to where you are.

I'll make you.

I'll make you.....

I'll make you proclaim that I'm the best best friend that you've ever had.

Hey you, why the heck are you writing down everything, even the sound of me clearing my throat..... I thought I told you to erase the first part!

Shut up, so are you going to rewrite from the beginning?

Why are you writing my part of our conversation! Hey, you even wrote down my previous comment..... hey I already told you this isn't needed..... hey to what extent are you writing... you're fast..... dahhhhhhhhhhh what the heck! I say why are you writing everything! Ahh, but, uhm, forget it, this is getting bothersome, I'm getting pursued here anyway, just deliver this.

Well, the last part.

Erm, your best friend Ryner Lute.

Sion Ahotaare [5]..... you trash, how dare you refer to His Majesty as Ahotaare!

Hey, why are you suddenly including your own opinion! It's my message isn't it! Anyway, why are you demonstrating your thick-headedness on paper now..... ahh, it has become kind of tiring..... erm yeah. That's fine as well. Okay, let's end this, shall we? Okay, the end. Please pass this to Sion. Do you understand?

"....."

That was the end of the message.

And then Sion, without thinking.

"..... what the heck is he doing?"

He smiled involuntarily as he said that. The excessively silly contents in the letter caused Sion, who carried a constant state of tension in his nerves since splitting up from Ryner, to loosen up considerably.

The tensed up Sion loosened up.

"..... idiot."

Sion smiled as he said that.

As he smiled, a few drops of tears started flowing from his eyes.

"..... idiot. Why..... why is he always....."

His voice drifted off, unable to say anything further.

Even though he had betrayed him in such a terrible manner, Ryner could still say something like this.

I'll make you proclaim that I'm the best best friend that you've ever had.....

A long time ago.

Though he thought so a long time ago.

"..... to me..... somehow to me, you were my best friend of the past, Ryner."

Sion's voice seemed to crack up as he said that.

If possible, he would apologize to Ryner. He would immediately proclaim that Ryner is his best best friend. From here on, to laugh like idiots together. To tell him to work through the night together and have him say 'no way' and run away. To chase after him and force him back to work. To have him helping him in his work despite his whining. And occasionally, to sit on the rooftop viewing the night sky, with Ryner, and Ferris, eating dango together. And making meaningless chatter and laughing together.

Those kind of days.

If he could return to those kind of days, he would abandon this world.

That was what Sion thought.

That was what he thought strongly.

"....."

But those were only his thoughts.

Even as a dream, he could only dream about those things in a dream itself.

Even if he was crying.

He would look straight ahead.

With certainty, without looking back.

Moving onward and forward.

Because he is such a king.

“……”

At that moment, his tears had already stopped.

Carrying an emotionless expression.

With only a perfect faint smile.

The face of an unwavering, perfect, flawless hero king.

Sion lifted his head and called for the earlier messenger.

And then.

“…… send for Froaude. In the case of Ryner Lute…… or rather.”

He stopped momentarily before continuing.

“…… in the case of this country’s traitorous fugitive, he shall be apprehended by all means necessary.”

In that manner, Sion corrected his own words.

Chapter 2 - The Moment When Light Fell

"So there you are", Ryner said as he scowled at the beautiful woman in front of him with half-opened eyes.

Two hours had already passed since he shook off the mage soldiers. It was pitch-black just a while ago but now, the sky was starting to brighten.

The 'usual place' he was to meet Ferris had to be Wynitt dango shop, but when he arrived there, she was nowhere in sight,

“Uwah, she’s not here.”

Ryner grumbled while he headed towards Fargo dango shop located at the outskirts, and when he arrived, the proprietress lady who was just opening the shop said,

“Ah ~, if you’re looking for Ferris-chan, "*I’m currently making a dango tour!*" she was saying as she headed towards Pappul dango pastry shop.”

"Huh, if you’re supposed to wait for me, don’t go about making a dango tour for heaven’s sake!!"

He shouted as he made his way to Pappul dango pastry shop which, by the time he reached it at five in the morning, was already open for business and the shop owner, without saying a word, handed him a piece of paper that said,

“Fuhahahaha! How was it! With your level of moronic brain tissue --- in short moronic tissue, it’s impossible for you to find me, the genius bishojo! Is it mortifying? Mortifying, isn’t it? Fuffuffu. Well well, if you’re feeling that mortified, then try finding me!!”

“I DON’T HAVE THAT KIND OF TIMEEEEEEEEE!”

As Ryner was yelling out, the shop owner said,

“Man, it must have always been tough on you.”

His pity for Ryner made him feel like crying .

That's right. It was really tough on him, till the point that he did not even have any energy left to respond.

Well, this was really not the time to go along with Ferris's foolish antics. Since they were still being pursued by Roland's military. Every minute and every second counted and he really had to link up with Ferris as soon as possible to discuss the matter on leaving Roland.

That's why he kept looking back and forth at his surroundings, and thought about which was the next dango shop where he would be able to capture that dango fanatic troublesome girl.

He looked at both the left and right paths, and started to consider.

''Now, which of the dango shops along the two paths will she be at?''

''The one on the right is the closer one, but recently she prefers to patronize the one on the left which I think she mentioned was called Puum, or did she mention that at all, arghhhhhh, why do I have to think about such stupid things!''

While he was thinking about this wearily, the shop owner behind him continued.

"Well, you don't seem to have any choice really. It is a man's duty to work hard for a beautiful woman, and besides, she really is an incredible beauty."

Without turning around, Ryner replied.

"*Is it really enough to be just beautiful!* That's really something I want to scream out right now."

"No but, aside from her looks, she also has an incredible personality, hasn't she?"

However, Ryner reacted by just raising his eyebrows,

"Really?"

He said.

But the shop owner did not waver.

"Yeah. The other day, you know, there was a carriage passing by

this shop at an incredible speed, while a puppy was passing through, and it seemed like it was going to get run over in an instant! And at that moment, within a hair's breadth, she dived across to save that puppy. As a result she was completely covered with bruises and mud."

"Wow."

"But the puppy was fine and didn't have a single scratch. She was willing to go out of the way and risk getting injured to save that puppy."

"Woah. Well, she does seem like one who would do this sort of....."

As Ryner was speaking, the shop owner seemed to get emotional,

"And the number of puppies she has saved to date, has already exceeded two hundred in number....."

"Huh, what kind of lie is that!"

Ryner instinctively made a comeback.

And he turned around and looked at the shop owner behind the counter.

As he did that, for some reason, the shop owner appeared flustered.

"....."

Furthermore, also behind that counter, not knowing from where and when she appeared, was Ferris, scribbling furiously on a piece of paper.

"....."

After she was done, she hurriedly handed the piece of paper to the shop owner and ducked back under the counter.

The shop owner then read from the piece of paper with a nervous voice,

"It..... it's not a lie! Truly, two hundred puppies were indeed saved! If you think that number is insignificant, there is still that you know? Cats! Two hundred cats as well..... no, two thousand cats were saved!"

Those words.

“……”

Ryner, without a doubt, had nothing to say to that.

A piece of paper was passed out from beneath the counter.

“And also, and also babies! Babies who just started crawling, they were just too full of themselves and willfully took long trips from their homes you see……”

What kind of babies will get too full of themselves and willfully take long trips from their homes! Ryner wanted to make such a comeback at that point, but given how meaningless it seemed to be, he decided to bear with it.

However, the shop owner, in other words Ferris still continued on her silly antics.

“Somehow, for some reason, they were climbing mountains as well. And those were volcano types. Well you see, babies are still ignorant and can’t tell the danger those mountains hold.”

‘’No, that’s not the crux……”

“On top of that, those babies while crawling with lots of vigor, trod on one another, and in the blink of an eye all 1.5 trillion of them slipped at the same time! They were all about to fall into the volcano at the same timeee!”

The shop owner was shouting energetically all of a sudden.

Thereafter, left without a choice, Ryner was thinking of making a comeback statements like "*how can such a stupid thing be possibleeeeee?!*", or "*I don’t think there are even 1.5 trillion human beings in this world to begin withhhhhh!*", but before that, he started to imagine ten thousand babies making “zugagagagaga” sounds and climbing furiously and all of them started falling into the volcano at the same time, and then thought that it was truly an unbelievably majestic scene.

“…… wait, ahhh, somehow, somehow it feels kind of pretty incredible.”

That being said, Ferris again immediately handed another piece of

paper to the shop owner. He read it,

“That, that’s right! What a horrible tragedy, don’t you think!”

“..... yeah.”

“That’s the thing! That’s when the soft-hearted, that’s when the soft-hearted Ferris Eris-sama, whose heart is even softer than cotton candy, went to the rescue, saving the world! That’s exactly how it was!!”

That kind of.

After hearing that kind of transcendent story, Ryner,

“.....”

He nodded his head anyway.

As he looked at the shop owner’s somewhat tired face, he understood, and made a "*I can understand exactly what you’re going through*" expression, which caused the shop owner to smile bitterly. After the two men connected on a heart-to-heart level, Ryner slowly walked towards the back of the counter.

Ferris, who was crouching under the counter, was once again writing furiously on a piece of paper.

And written on it were the following: “Furthermore, she also rescued 8 trillion, 600 million, and 400 koala bears who were falling off the trees they were climbing, isn’t she something?! (please use an intensely excited tone when you reached this portion on *isn’t she something?!*)”. And Ryner was staring at that nonsense written on that piece of paper.

“..... erm.”

As he said that, with half-opened eyes, he was scowling at the back

of that trouble-causing beautiful woman.

She was found out!? With a startled expression, she turned around, opened her mouth as if to say something, then stopped, then opened her mouth again, then stopped, and finally said,

“Wh... what a coincidence Ryner. I just arrived at this shop a moment ago.”

“..... I see.”

“By the way, I just heard from Oyaji. [6] Seems like you’ve heard quite a lot about me?”

“..... yeah, I’ve heard.....”

“What do you think? Isn’t it a little unexpected..... a little unexpected of me..... how was it like?”

She was asking for feedback on her cock-and-bull story with nothing but sheer excitement on her face, which made Ryner feel even more weary.

The obvious answer to that would be "*As I thought, it was really an unexpectedly idiotic story*", but since he could see himself getting killed with that kind of response, with a somewhat stiff voice, he decided to go with,

“..... ermmm..... ah ~, yeah. That’s it. I’ve known all along that you are an incredibly kind and good person, but that was really kind of unexpected heh.”

He was doing his best to prevent his voice from involuntarily growing light.

And then,

“Is that really so? That’s so true! That’s right! I’m really a good person! Fufufu.”

In an instant, she was in a completely joyous mood. It goes without saying that her face was beaming happily at the praise.

She was getting all jubilant like an idiot for such a meaningless thing.

“.....”

Well, actually, she was not really making a face that was obviously full of happy emotions, at the very least not to others, if any, who might be looking at her. It was just that unlike most people, Ryner was able to tell even the slightest change of emotions from her mostly expressionless face.

And to him, from her face, she was undoubtedly having fun right now.

As Ryner looked at her face, there were still words he wanted to grumble and protest aloud,

"....."

But he gave up on that.

I don't really have time to go along with your foolish games, he thought..... but after seeing how happy she was from all these silly antics, *well, I'll let it pass*, was what he thought.

Because, when he first met her, there was no way she would make such a face.

When he first met her, she had a completely expressionless face, and spoke with a voice that had hardly any inflection, as if she was merely a life-sized doll.

And that was probably due to her upbringing.

It was all due to the fact that she was the younger sister of that monster Lucile.

Perhaps not just that. It was probably due to the fact that her House --- the Eris swords clan, was an extraordinary clan.

A mere doll possessing an extraordinary strength.

To other ordinary folk, this level of strength was something that could even be called a monstrous strength.

And for her to acquire such power at a young age, it was inevitable for her to have sacrificed something for it.

And in her case, they were her emotions, her expressions, and her smile.

Of course, that was something not so uncommon in this particular

country. The institution where Ryner was previously placed in was such a place as well.

In the former Roland, which was under a tyrannical rule, these could be said to be fairly common occurrences.

Abnormally intense trainings, human experiments, and people who went insane because of that, Ryner had bore witness to many of such stories.

To die before one goes mad, or to live and break down eventually, those were the two mutually exclusive choices in most cases.

And she was one of those who lived.

The price for that was the loss of her emotions.

"....."

However, right before Ryner, she, who was supposed to have lost her emotions, was smiling happily.

And that was deep-felt genuine happiness, Ryner thought.

And that was probably a thin line.

The thin line that divides the possibility of retaining her emotions and the possibility of breaking down and possibly going mad.

It was just like the time when Ryner had given up on everything.

She completely sealed her emotions away.

However, despite the fact that the emotions were barely visible, she was smiling.

Without showing any expression and any emotion, a dango lover, a troublesome beauty who was ignorant of the world around her.

She who should have lost her emotions.

Day by day, she was regaining bits and pieces of her emotions, that was what Ryner felt.

And that was due to her spending the days with Ryner.

And that was due to her spending the days with Sion.

The three of them spending their days fooling around.

And Ryner thought so again.

It was thanks to Sion.

Ferris was also saved by Sion, he thought.

It also was Sion who pulled her from the depths of darkness.

Ryner and Ferris, who had been entrapped in darkness for a long time, were pulled out by Sion.

“.....”

This was something that Ryner would normally never say out loud, but the truth was that Ryner had always wondered whether he was in a dream.

After meeting Sion.

After meeting Ferris.

To have spent his days with the two of them, it was as if he was living a dream in which he was having tons of fun, he thought.

The insane amounts of work that Sion pushed on him everyday, Ferris swinging her sword at him on her whims, and him shouting "*It’s annoyingggggg!*" at them, but even with that, the truth was that he was enjoying himself as well.

Compared to the amount of trouble they brought him, the number of times they saved him were way more than that, that was truly what he thought.

“.....”

The rainy night when Sion told him he was going to kill him.

Ryner once again wanted to give up.

Just as always, finding everything to be a bother, he wanted to give up on everything.

If he was going to be killed by him.

If I’m going to be killed by my best friend who saved me, I can just die

here, that was what he thought of immediately.

Anyway, there's no real worth in me staying alive, I just happened to have a beautiful dream, and that's enough.

It had always been like that since the beginning. Important things like happiness and friends, as a monster, there was no way he could have acquired all that.

But at that point in time, something different from before awoke within him.

Ferris's words resounded in his head.

It was at a time when he should have given up as usual, an image of her face appeared in his head.

And she said.

To a monster with a worthless life. To me, a defiled monster who is only capable of hurting others, she said.

Someone who should have lost her emotions. Expressionless, rampaging, self-centred, spouting nonsensical ramblings all the time, that Ferris, to the Ryner who was ready to give up, who looked as he was about to cry as he was getting ready to die, she said.

That Ferris who should have lost all traces of her emotions, with a teary expression.

With a sorrowful, lonely expression, she smiled faintly.

"..... you idiot. If you were to die..... it would be lonely without you....."

Those words struck him hard in his mind as he remembered them. The wall that he used to protect himself, which had been built up over the years till then, seemed to be completely shattered at that.

And the Ryner then could no longer afford to die. He could no longer afford to give up. He realized what a fool he had been before. *I have caused her such grief and why didn't I realize this earlier?*

I was saved.

I owed her, the two of them so much. What had I been doing up till

now? He thought.

Why is it that he kept pushing them away as they reached out to him, and hurting them as a result.

In order to avoid getting hurt himself, he had hurt them.

And he actually used the excuse of not wanting to hurt them in order to cover it up.

"....."

Ryner looked at Ferris.

He looked at her delighted self.

There was a trace of expression on her face now.

It might be something that was hard to discern, but if one looked closely at her, not just Ryner but someone else, they might be able to notice it as well. That was what had changed.

It was different from the past.

She had changed, little by little.

It was not just Ryner.

Ryner, Ferris, and perhaps even Sion, had changed, little by little.

Because they were spending time together after all.

Because they were spending time together making a fool out of themselves, and laughing merrily like idiots.

It was thus not unrealistic to believe that in the near future, she would be able to laugh out loud. Ryner was sure of that.

If they were together.

He might be getting too far ahead, but if they were to stay together, the day will come when she would be able to laugh heartily, he thought.

And he wanted to see that day come.

He wanted to be by her side and witness it when that day comes,

the day when she will be able to show a laughing face, laughing out loud from her heart, he thought.

And.

"....."

He wanted to show that to Sion as well.

That was what he thought.

The Sion who was now alone, appearing to be burdened by some unknown force.

He wanted to show him her laughing face, her crying face, he thought.

No, not just her.

All by himself, he is wallowing in despair, hopelessness, and seemed ready to die. "Ferris and I really wanted to support you in every way possible", we need to let him know how we feel.

If Sion dies.

If he dies, I'll definitely.

I'll definitely go crazy from the pain, and wail out loudly, I need to tell him all that.

"....."

Ryner looked at Ferris.

Just not long ago, she was crying.

Ryner felt extremely flustered from seeing her cry for the first time.

In the prison.

When she came to rescue him, she started crying when she finally found out where he was.

For someone who should carry no emotions at all, Ryner and Sion were the ones who made her cry.

Ryner suddenly went missing on her, with his whereabouts

unknown to her.

Sion became weird.

And she became unsettled.

She became unsettled from the feeling of losing everything she had, and finally when she found Ryner, she started crying in relief……

The two of them had become a huge and important part of her life.

For someone who should not possess any emotions, like an empty doll, Ferris was driven to the edge in such a manner.

Just because Ryner disappeared.

Just because Sion became weird.

It was because of that she was driven to the edge.

Did Sion understand that?

Did he really think Ryner and Ferris could leave him alone fighting all by himself?

If he really thought that way.

"…… we have to make him realize that."

Ryner thought.

Well, even though that's what he thought, he couldn't really fathom what was happening.

As before, he was not in a position to contact Sion directly, and from the previous dialogue with the mage soldiers, it seemed like they were ordered to kill him if he couldn't be captured.

In fact, the second wave may be coming after them soon.

There were already a ton of things they needed to do.

Even if Ferris was still feeling unsettled from all that had happened, it was not the time nor the place to continue fooling around.

Ryner looked at Ferris.

Not knowing since when, she grabbed a string of red bean paste

dango from the racks and stuffed it into her mouth.

“Oo, delicious!”

What a thing to say.

The dango shop owner’s face brightened up at that.

“Ah, that was actually a new creation, Ferris-chan. It was filled with a special type of honey. I call it mitsuan-dango. [7]”

“Mitsuan-dango!? You must have spent time thinking of that, Oyaji!”

“That’s right.”

“That’s awesome! This mitsuan-dango is definitely going to become popular throughout the town!”

“Fufufu. In order to convert my own residence into a dango specialist shop, I’ve racked up quite a lot of debt, and that’s why I’ve worked so hard at this, you know ～.”

What a fun conversation it seems to be, eh... it seems like she can really live on dango alone, does she really need me and Sion? He pondered briefly and said.

“Hey Ferris, we haven’t even managed to meet up with Sion yet, isn’t it too early for you to be back on your feet already?”

Ferris turned her head and tilted it towards him, with an incredulous expression on her face.

“Huh? Get back on my feet? What are you talking about? I didn’t get depressed at all.”

“Is that so?”

“Yup.”

“Hm ～ but you know, just now in the prison, you were cry……”

In an instant.

As usual!

The same usual development unfolded!

With a speed that was not visible to the naked eye of most, she drew her sword and the flat of the blade came smashing into his face.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?”

And he was sent flying, crashing into the ground with a spin.

“Gafa.”

He landed.

With a tearful expression, he looked up and Ferris said to him.

“Come again, who did what?”

“..... well, you know, you.....”

“Hm?”

“..... nothing, nothing happened really.....”

Ryner said with a shaking voice.

Well but, the reaction she had just now, that it in itself showed that she was worried about Sion as well, he thought.

Probably.....

He was not really confident about that though.....

And at that moment, she peered down at Ryner.

“By the way Ryner, you went flying all of a sudden, what happened to you? You aren’t covered with any bruises or mud, it seems. Don’t tell me you saw an illusion of a dog getting run over by a carriage? Don’t tell me you are on some kind of dubious drug?”

In response to that, Ryner,

“..... yeah. I’m on a drug.....”

Somehow, he replied with a matching response.

He really had no time to fool around with her anymore.

After sighing slightly, he got up on his feet in a flash. He used his hands to brush off the imaginary mud.

And he sighed again, and said.

“Well, it’s time for some serious talk. Let’s review our situation now.”

At that, she nodded her head and said.

“Okay. But before that Ryner, there is something I need to tell you.”

“Tell me?”

“Yeah.”

“What?”

“Well, currently, a matter of grave importance had cropped up within Roland..... did you know?”

She said it with a strangely meek expression, and Ryner squinted his eyes.

“..... a matter of grave importance? Is it something that is even graver than the war with Nelpha?”

She nodded with the same meek expression.

“Nothing can be compared to this.”

“Nothing can be compared..... so, what’s the matter about?”

She kept silent for a moment, and started taking deep breaths to quell her apparent nervousness, and said.

“Currently, within this Roland Empire, a universally most awesome dango, the mitsuan-dango has been perfected by Oyaji of this Pappul pastry shop.....”

“I don’t care about that anyhowwwwwwwwwww!!”

This time round, Ryner yelled with all his might.

However, she was shocked at his reaction,

“What, what, what do you mean by you don’t care about that! Oyaji of Pappul had to spend years of tireless effort to perfect this!”

The shop owner butted in as well,

“That, that’s right! In order to build this shop, I had to take on a large amount of loans! If I can’t sell this, if I can’t sell this, my whole family will be ruined you bastard!”

He scolded vigorously, and Ryner replied,

“..... erm, ahh, well, if you are putting your family on the line, that really seems like a grave matter but, ermm, well, what should we do about it ?”

That somehow helped to calm him down a little.

Then Ferris made a "*you finally understood us*" face and said,

“Alright. Anyway, why don’t you first try one of these mitsuan-dango. If you do that, then even if it’s you, you would be able to understand its greatness. After that, we can go into the inner zashiki [8] and discuss our strategies for pushing this dango to the rest of the world.”

“Well, we have other strategies to discuss and it will really be bad if we don’t.....”

“Now now, try eating this.”

“Well but, we still have pursuers hot on our heels. If we continue to hang around here carelessly, it will become a dangerous..... wah, what’s this! This is stupendously delicious!”

“Didn’t I tell you! Oyaji! This stupid man gave a thumbs-up as well!”

The shop owner made a gutsy pose,

“Yes! With this, I would be able to pay off my loans!”

"*Wahhahha*", Ferris and the shop owner both laughed at the same time.

“.....”

He stared blankly at the two of them.

Somehow.

It was somehow a peaceful scene, Ryner thought.

It seemed so peaceful that he was the one who looked like an idiot while he fretted anxiously.

He began to consider the development in which they started relaxing in the inner zashiki, and started feeling as if there was sufficient time……

While he was feeling that……

"……"

Suddenly, a light appeared from the nearby surroundings.

Ryner opened his eyes fully.

The light took up a sash-like form and was streaking towards the shop.

And Ryner knew what that light was.

It was magic. A type of attack magic.

A powerful, highly damaging spear of light.

Among the magic used in Roland, it counts as one of the more destructive types.

It's **Kuuri**.

That spear of light was the first.

Second.

Third.

Fourth.

Using his eyes, Ryner counted a total of twelve rays of **Kuuri** fired towards them.

"Ferris!"

Ryner yelled.

But she was already moving. Carrying the shop owner, she leaped to the second floor.

After verifying that, Ryner leaped as well.

After reading the trail of **Kuuri**, he turned his body away from it, and followed close behind her.

The magic struck.

With overwhelming power, the flashes of light struck Pappul dango pastry shop.

The counter disintegrated into pieces, the pillar was ripped apart, and a hole was blasted through the wall.

From behind them,

“The, the shop..... my debts arghhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

What a wretched woeful cry that was, but they did not have the luxury of time to pay attention to that.

The spell known as **Kuuri**, is one of relatively higher difficulty level. It was unlikely that the mage soldiers that were pursuing them a while ago had learned the spell at their level.

In other words, the current pursuers were much more skilled than those earlier.

And from the number of **Kuuri** launched against them, the pursuers numbered at least twelve.

Ryner knitted his eyebrows.

“Arghhh, this is really bothersome.....that’s why I told you we should have quickly planned out our next move and made our escape preparations..... what should we do now Ferris?”

While he remained attentive to the enemy’s movement behind them, his eyes were looking at Ferris.

As he was saying that, she was standing on the rooftop --- well, since the first level of the shop had collapsed inwards entirely, the roof was pretty low --- with the shop owner in her left arm, and her right hand on her sword preparing to draw it at anytime.

While glaring in the direction of the enemy, she said,

“We’ll run of course. If we fight, I don’t have the confidence in holding back and avoid wounding any one of them.”

Ryner nodded. He was also thinking along the same line.

If the two of them were to fight them, they would certainly triumph over them. To put it in another way, they were capable of wiping them out without incurring a single wound themselves.

However, they were certainly not opponents against which they could hold back their strength and avoid injuring any one of them.

Several of them would probably be seriously wounded. Perhaps a few of them might even die.

Roland's soldiers.

They couldn't lift their hands to kill any soldiers of Roland Empire, a place where they belonged to just a while ago.

"..... now really, this has become really bothersome."

After saying that, Ryner took a small leap to just stand beside her.

"So now, we run?"

She nodded.

"Right. While we are running, we should discuss about our future plans."

"Ah, finally you feel like getting down to some serious business eh?"

"I've always been serious."

"..... sigh."

"Why are you sighing!?"

"No no. It's just that it has really been fun traveling with you."

"Y... you, you dare make a fool out of me....."

"I'm not, I'm not, stop brandishing your sword at me while the enemy is still around!!"

Ryner yelled, sighed again, and looked in front of him.

The enemy had not shown themselves yet. They were hiding in the

shadows of some buildings along the street, watching them.

Not knowing their exact numbers, it would be a difficult thing to just blindly rush through them. Now, what's next?

"It would be better for us to stay here and wait until they come out of hiding before we start running, but Oyaji may get caught up in it....."

He looked down towards the shop owner whose head was drooped in despair while murmuring ''the debts'', ''the debts''.

Ferris nodded,

"We definitely can't get the dango shop involved in our problems."

"Now now, it's not just about dango shops, but anyone for that matter. So, which way do we go? Right?"

"Left."

"Left huh. Okay. Cover me for a while, would you? If I don't use magic to enhance my speed, I won't be able to catch up with you. It will take three seconds for me to invoke it."

"Alright."

"Okay, shall I go ahead?"

"Do it."

Ryner lifted up and pointed his hand to the sky.

As he did that, he started drawing out words of light in the air.

The magic symbols that were drawn were evidently of a different structure from that of Roland's magic.

It was magic which he previously stole from Estabul's mage knights using the special power of his eyes, **Alpha Stigma**.

However, as expected, the enemy, who were waiting for them to make a move, started their attack to interfere with Ryner's spell casting.

To start off, there were several daggers flying towards him diagonally from his right.

But Ryner did nothing to avoid them.

Rather, there was no need to.

Because Ferris promptly used her sword to deflect the incoming projectiles.

Next, balls of fire began flying towards him somewhere from his left. Ferris then thrust her sword into planks of wood that made up the roof, and with her sword acting like a skewer, flung the wood off towards the incoming fireballs. The pieces of wood were shattered into smaller pieces on contact with the projectiles. However, not a single one of them came anywhere near the duo.

And Ryner was gaping at the action,

“Wow, awesome.”

As he said that, Ferris turned and glared at him and said.

Just hurry up.”

“Ya ya.”

Finally, from behind her, came streaking towards them was the same magic that was used previously.

The spears of light, **Kuuri**.

It seemed like something that even Ferris couldn’t do anything about it, that’s why Ryner started to dodge.

But.

To that she,

“Hn”

She merely made a small sound and swiftly cut the spears of light with her sword.

“……”

Ryner, for an instant, wanted to smile at that.

Because that was the first time he saw someone cutting light. Well, her skill with the sword is always something that amazes him

however.....

Thinking about that, he remembered a scene in which he saw her slicing lightning apart but.....

But as he thought of that, Ryner started to feel a strange unease and his hand that was inscribing magic symbols stopped moving.

"..... eh?"

He murmured briefly.

She sliced apart lightning --- as those words floated in his head, all of a sudden, he felt a sharp strong pain in his head.

That particular memory, when it happened, where it happened, why it happened, he could recall absolutely nothing at all.

Well, in the first place, was that lightning from the sky?

Or was it something that came from magic?

He could not even remember that detail.

At the very least, Roland should not have any magic in the form of lightning in existence……

“…… ouch!”

At that thought, his head was once again assaulted by an excruciating pain, and Ryner groaned……

“Wh... what is this.”

Something odd was happening. Whenever he thought about lightning, he got an immense headache.

Lightning.

Lightning magic.....

“Gua”

In a flash, he felt an immense pain in his head, a nauseating feeling, and giddiness.

“What the hell is this.”

Ryner, with an unsettled feeling, stopped thinking. And his headache was gone.

It was obvious that there was something strange going on.

It was as if he was forcefully disallowed from thinking about anything related to lightning, that was the feeling he got.

What was actually happening now? Rather, it was not now, but probaby something that happened while he was imprisoned.....

“..... I was brainwashed.....?”

But what kind of brainwashing was that?

What was it that was related to lightning that was erased from my mind?

While Ryner was starting to ponder about that,

“Hey!”

A voice was heard and "*Gon*"! A loud sound was made as he was given a sharp knock by a sword on his head,

“Gua arghhhhhh!?”

Ryner clutched his head,

“Wh... what the heck are you doing!”

He yelled angrily and Ferris,

“The same goes for you..... wh..... what the heck are you doing! Even if it’s us, anything beyond this..... damn.”

She sounded strained.

He looked at her and saw her desperately slicing away at dozens of **Kuuri** launched successively, in order to prevent him from getting struck.

“Ah, I’m sorry.”

Ryner apologized instinctively.

And without looking back, she said,

“If you have..... the time to apologize..... quickly..... finish working on the spell.”

As she said that, he looked at the glowing words he had drawn in front of him and said.

“Ah, I’m sorry about that as well. It’s already done.”

“I’ll kill you.”

“Please don’t kill me.”

“Then hurry up and do it!”

“Ya ya.”

And Ryner started to chant the words.

"I OFFER UP THIS CONTRACT OF WORDS, TO BEAR THE SPIRIT BEASTS OF MALICE THAT SLEEPS WITHIN THIS EARTH!"

The spell was finally completed.

At the same time.

Ryner’s movement speed started increasing.

He shook his hand lightly to verify that, well beyond his normal physical limits, his movement speed was several times faster than before, and he said.

“Alright, it’s done. Which way are we going again?”

“Right.”

“Liar ～. You said ‘left’ earlier, didn’t you ～.”

“If you remember, don’t ask again!”

“So, in the end, which way are we going?”

Ferris looked left and right, and after confirming that both paths had gradually narrowed due to the encircling of the enemy,

“Alright. Let’s go the opposite way.”

Ryner nodded.

“Well, let’s go then.”

“Right.”

“I’ll restrict their movement with magic, while you go first.”

“Understood.”

“Alright, I’m just going to do this once……”

Ryner’s hand started moving in the air again. With an unbelievable speed, he inscribed glowing magic symbols in the air.

One done.

Two done.

Three done.

Four done.

Five done.

He finished constructing the equations with a speed that could not be followed by the naked eye, and looked in the direction of the enemy.

The enemy, as before, were going to fire successive bouts of **Kuuri**. That was the right tactic.

There was no question that the other side had greater firepower. If that’s the case, he should have used more and stronger magic to suppress them.

However.

“That isn’t the right way to use **Kuuri**.”

Ryner grinned broadly and started to chant.

“WHAT I SEEK IS IRIDESCENT DESTRUCTION > > > KUURI!”

In an instant, rays of light were fired simultaneously from the first three magic inscriptions that Ryner had drawn.

All three of them were aimed at the same place.

As the rays intersected, an even bigger and more intense sash of light was created, and at the midpoint between Ryner and the enemy, the light particles fell to the ground.

Subsequently, a huge exploding sound was heard and the earth split open.

The ground that was paved with earth and stones was turned up, causing pebbles and gravel to fly, creating a cloud of sand dust.

There were probably some who were hit by the blast, but that was not what Ryner was aiming for. Creating the cloud of sand dust was his true objective.

In an instant, the smoke-like cloud of sand dust that was stirred up greatly reduced the visibility between the two sides.

Of course, at that moment, the enemy would be thinking of rushing him. And Ryner would definitely respond again with a magic attack. The next attack spell would take some time to prepare. By taking advantage of the low visibility, they would capture Ryner..... that’s what they would be thinking.

But Ryner still had two completed magic inscriptions that were not invoked yet.

While grinning broadly.

“WHAT I SEEK IS IRIDESCENT DESTRUCTION > > > KUURI!”

He chanted.

A ray of light was shot out again.

It was aimed in the direction of the enemy.

But it was aimed at a slightly higher point.

It was high enough not to hit the enemy soldiers, but yet not too high at the same time so as to brush by their heads and startle them.

“Uwaah!?”

The gasps of surprise could be heard.

And highly likely, the soldiers should stop moving for around ten over seconds. With the low visibility, and the fact a **Kuuri** was fired from the opposing side of the dust cloud, they would be too fearful to make a foolish move.

At that moment,

“So long guys ～”

Ryner started running.

He retreated from that place swiftly, full of vigor.

In the midst of running, after putting some distance away from the enemy, once again,

“WHAT I SEEK IS IRIDESCENT DESTRUCTION ＞＞＞ KUURI!”

He invoked the final magic inscription.

The enemy probably still thought that Ryner was still standing on the roof of the dango shop.

That would delay them for another ten over seconds.

That would sum up to around thirty seconds.

With that kind of time, he could easily escape from their line of sight.

Ryner turned his head around from the direction of the enemy to face forward.

As he did so, Ferris appeared from a back alley just some distance away, and he ran towards her.

“What are you doing in a back alley?”

As he was asking her, he caught a glimpse of the dango shop owner lying on the ground behind her.

“Ah I see.”

Ryner nodded in agreement.

If they were to leave Oyaji back there, his death would have been certain. And this was something that was completely off Ryner’s mind back then.

Ferris looked at him with a doubtful expression,

“What was the matter with you back then? You took a pretty long time to invoke that magic, forgot all about the shopkeeper. And furthermore, you had that moronic face looking towards the sky..... wait, the moronic face is a usual occurrence though.....”

“Now, there was no real need to insert that extra line.....”

“In spite of that, somehow you were staring blankly at the sky. What really happened?”

At her question, Ryner scratched his head and said.

“Well regarding that, that was something bothering me actually.....”

“Something bothering you?”

“Yeah. Regarding lightning..... ah, well, forget it. Is Oyaji okay?”

“Uh-huh. He’s only out cold.”

“You’re kind of dangerous when you get violent, were you the one who hit him?”

But Ferris shook her head.

“Ah, so, he passed out from the fear.”

However, she shook her head again,

“He was crying out *ahhh my debts* and his eyes rolled over all of a sudden.”

“Eeh ～”

When he heard that, Ryner felt a slight ache in his chest. Well, rather than a slight ache, it might have been a little bit stronger.

But Ferris promptly,

“Now, let’s hurry up and get out of here.”

“Uwah, Ferris is strong. Don’t you feel any kind of heartache?”

With a confused look,

“What are you talking about?”

“Well, it’s nothing if you don’t get it.”

“Well let’s go. The situation doesn’t look too good right now.”

What a thing to say now, and only until now,

“That was what I had been telling you all this while ～”

“Is that so? Well that’s a pity though. Whenever you talk, I don’t seem to hear you at all!”

For some reason, she was brimming with confidence as she said that, and he replied,

“..... well, can you start paying attention to what I say from now on..... please?”

“No way.”

“Ermm..... fine. Since I’ve already known right from the beginning that’s the way you are.....”

After Ryner said that with a tired voice, he turned his head around again.

Even though the enemy were still unsure of which way Ryner went and were not coming after them yet, they would get found out sooner or later if they were to continue to hang around here leisurely.

Ryner looked at the lady who had always been inattentive to what he said,

"..... alright. Let's discuss our strategy along the way as we are getting out of here."

"Right."

And the duo ran.

They entered the shopping district, ran just two to three bends ahead, and agilely jumped up onto the rooftops of the grocery stores, and leaped from roof to roof.

Even though there was probably no pursuers who could match up to the speed and vigor at which they were moving, they showed no signs of slowing down.

Ryner began to speak as he was running. He looked at Ferris who was running beside him,

"Well, before we make any other move from now on, it would be prudent to first verify the current state of affairs of Roland."

Ferris nodded.

"Fugo, gogofugoo, fufufugo." (munching sounds)

She had four mitsuan-dango in her mouth.

"What the, you managed to bring those along in that kind of situation!"

She swallowed them hastily,

"Of course. That was my top priority and I did my best to grab as much as I could."

"Seriously?"

"Yep. Because of that, I didn't manage to cover you fully, and there were around two instances that you were nearly hit by those dangerous magic from the sky, which really made me break out in cold sweat."

"That's scaryyyyyyyyyyyy, erm wait, you should be covering me properly hello?"

"It was your bad for staring blankly and not paying attention in the midst of a battle."

“I thought that it was more of your bad for going all out to secure those dango in the midst of a battle.”

At the end of the day, the fault belonged to both.

“Well, putting that aside anyhow.”

Ryner said.

“We definitely need to leave the country for now. It’s not the first time we are getting chased after though, but currently, there is obviously something strange about this country. I think we need to get another perspective from outside of this country.”

“Thr... throat is blocked..... ocha [9].....”

“Huh? Shut up. I don’t have any.”

“Ah, ah..... ah, a flower bed.....”

“Eehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

“Ah, I’m fine now.”

“Die!”

“Yep. Almost did. That was dangerous.”

Ferris clutched her chest as she spoke with wheezing sounds, and Ryner, with a fed-up face, said.

“Well, that’s enough. Listen to me now.”

“Right. I was listening. You were talking about how dango and ocha are a must-have, is that right?”

“You are completely offffffffffff, aren’t you? I don’t feel like I’m getting anywhere in my communication with this person arghhhhhhhhhhh!”

As Ryner was yelling, Ferris said.

“Putting jokes aside, we need to get out of the country, is that right?”

“Ah, you were listening after all?”

“Fufu. I’m different from you in that I’m always serious.”

“Wow. That’s really awesome……”

Ryner said that with half-opened eyes, and Ferris nodded in contentment.

“I see I see. I’m a pretty awesome person! So, after leaving the country, what’s next? Do you have a way to break the deadlock in this situation?”

She asked.

“……”

Ryner thought back about Sion and what happened during that rainy night.

Sion told Ryner to die and a fight ensued.

And in the end, Sion transformed into something strange.

The Sion then said that he wanted to devour Ryner, something which he completely could not understand.

It seemed like he needed to devour something called **The Solver of All Equations**, and become something called ‘Shin’ or something like that.

But what did all that really mean?

The thing called **The Solver of All Equations** somehow seemed to be something special embedded within Ryner’s **Alpha Stigma** eyes.

Ryner closed his right eye, and felt his eyeball over his eyelid.

The ‘Shin’ that Sion would become after devouring his eyes, what was that referring to?

Was it the 'Shin' [10] in god?

Or was it the 'Shin' in truth?

With the current amount of information he had, he could hardly make head or tail on what was said.

Well, however, the figure that Sion transformed into was probably
---

Ryner recalled how he looked like at that time.

His whole skin was glowing a golden color, and underneath that body, there was something dark, ugly, something that appeared to be filled with despair creeping out of his body.

Underneath Sion's skin, there was some kind of a grotesque form..... sophisticated patterns, incantation words, magic, light, darkness, it felt like every possible thing belonging to this world was creeping out of his body.

To give an analogy, it seemed like a curse that was out to completely invade this world.

Something abnormal and unpleasant was inside Sion.

And the darkness.

To put it more accurately, it was something resembling a deep shroud of blackness that threatened to bury this entire world.

The scene changed.

All of a sudden, he was surrounded by a bunch of black swords.....

The swords.....

"Ah....."

At that memory, Ryner made a small sound.

That's right. At that moment back then, Ryner unleashed some form of magic. Something that was powerful and used for attacking purpose. However, the transformed Sion held up his hand, and the black swords struck the magic, and erased it completely.

The magic unleashed by Ryner.

It was as if that form of magic which he used did not even exist in this world in the first place.....

But what kind of magic did he actually use.....

At that moment,

“..... ouch.”

Ryner clutched his head again.

It was again that excruciating headache, giddiness, and nauseating feeling.

But he smiled. In spite of having that kind of intense headache, he smiled.

‘’That’s right. That time. Lightning.....’’

“..... gaa”

The headache was interfering with his thoughts. Despite the intense headache, he did not stop the flow of his thoughts.

‘’Lightning..... magic..... was..... what I used against Sion.’’

And it was erased.

The magic was erased.

As if it did not exist in this world right from the beginning.

He got the feeling that any trace of its former existence was completely erased from this world.

‘’But what was the true extent of that power? Was I the only one with my memories manipulated? Or.....’’

Ryner looked at Ferris.

She had that strangely worried expression again,

“Really, what is the matter with you, Ryner? You were looking at the sky again. Are you having a headache?”

He only gave a faint smile to indicate that he was fine, and then said,

“It’s nothing. But that aside, there’s something I need to ask you.”

“What?”

“You see, about me.”

“Yep.”

“Normally, what kind of magic do I use?”

“..... magic?”

She asked back.

“Yeah. The type of magic that I use normally. Do you remember what is it?”

While running, she folded her arms and tilted her head slightly to the side.

“Hm. Which is it, I wonder. What exactly is it..... hm? Well, I don’t know much about magic though.”

“But don’t you often see me using magic?”

“Yeah.”

“Just now, didn’t I keep using **Kuuri**? That spell carries too much power and it’s easy to kill the opponent with that.”

“Yeah, you don’t want that to happen.”

“But I can’t use **Misumi** as well. That would cause a flood which would be a troublesome thing.”

Ferris nodded.

“That goes the same for **Kurenai** and **Hamuro**. I don’t want to start a fire in the area.”

Ferris nodded again.

“So, what was it? What was it that I normally use?”

Her expression became troubled and disturbed.

“..... hmm? It’s strange. I’ve forgotten about it. What in the world.....”

But that was enough.

As expected, it was erased.

From Ferris’s memories as well.

From everyone's memories.

From the entire world.

Its existence was completely erased.

That was something.

"..... that was at the level of god....."

"God?"

Ferris asked, but Ryner did not answer.

That was obviously some extraordinary power. It could not be explained with the current advancements in magic, there was nothing in existence yet that could replicate that kind of power.

Well, in fact, even with the relics of heroes that were encountered to date, there probably was none that possess that level of power.

An extraordinary power that surpassed that of the relics of heroes.

That power wanted to devour Ryner and become Shin.

Ryner smiled bitterly without thinking.

About what Sion was embroiled in.

"....."

It was kind of too bothersome.

Just the relics of heroes alone were already more than what he could handle, and now there's this extremely immense power that appeared to be a great bother.

Well, that's why Sion decided to bear all the burdens all by himself, he thought.

However, the key to unlocking the mystery was not totally non-existent.

Assuming that he already got his hands on a number of keywords.

And because they did not connect till now, he was not aware of what they meant.

Because he had no desire to connect them, he was blind to them.

He did already in fact have a number of keywords.

The weaver of all equations.

The solver of all equations.

α.

ω.

The gate.

The key.

The crimson monster in his dream.

And Sion.....

Rather, the monster inside Sion, which he was unable to tell what it was even with his **Alpha Stigma**, wanted to devour Ryner, according to 'him', and become something called 'Shin', and he didn't really know whether it referred to the 'Shin' in truth, or 'Shin' in god.

That's right. It's not as if he was completely up against a dead end.

The keywords were starting to fall into place.

And these words were learned from outside of this country.

That's why there was a necessity to leave this country.

There was a necessity to gain another perspective of this country from outside of this country.

From Imperial Nelpha. From Runa Empire. From Cassla. It might be possible to gain an entirely new insight by realigning their perspective of this country from those three major powers of central Menoris.

Or at the very least, he should be able to get that new perspective if he were to view this country from Gastark.

The Gastark Empire that uses underhand means to gather the relics of heroes, a major power of the north.

If it's them, there was a chance that they might know more about what's happening to Sion.

Well, even though it brought back distasteful memories of them killing his friends, if it's Lir, the guy who killed Lafla, Pueka, and the rest, he would definitely know something about it.

At any rate, as he was on the verge of leaving during their last encounter, he said the following.

"..... well, as far as possible, do your best to avoid being betrayed, mad monster."

Do your best to avoid being betrayed.

Was that a prediction on what was happening now?

Did he know that Sion would one day betray Ryner?

“.....”

It was certain that he knew something.

Those from Gastark knew something.

Well, even if that's the case, it's unthinkable for them, who are actively hunting cursed eyes bearers, to get along casually with Ryner, an **Alpha Stigma** bearer, which meant that it would be difficult to acquire any kind of information from them, but was it not possible that such information was scattered around elsewhere outside of Roland?

Well, at the very least, there's nothing left to be learned within Roland. Ryner himself had spent many years researching on his **Alpha Stigma**, and hardly any lead had been turned up after all those years.

However, once he stepped outside of the country, this sort of information that he was seeking came tumbling into his lap one after another.

In other words, the key to the problem that Sion was bearing upon

himself, was it not possible for it to be scattered somewhere outside of the country?

That was also part of the reason for Ryner to leave this country.

In order to save Sion.

In order to discover the truth behind his eyes.

“Ferris.”

“Hn?”

“As I thought, we really should get out of this country.”

Ferris looked at him with a "*what are you saying when we are already at this juncture*" expression.

“You've already said that a number of times. What's wrong with you? Did you really just become an idiot?”

Ryner smiled wryly,

“Well, you see, after thinking about it, I've kind of found various reasons for us to leave this country, and each time I've mentioned it was the time when one of those reasons hit me.”

But Ferris had a slightly worried expression.

Ryner shrugged his shoulders.

“I'm telling you the truth. There's nothing wrong with me really.”

Ferris gave a few knocks to his head with her hand.

“Did somebody put something in your head while I wasn't looking?”

Though she was not too far away from the truth, Ryner shook his head.

“No way.”

But she didn't gave up.

“Or could it be that you got hit real hard on the head?”

“Well, that would be by you with your sword.”

And then she got a *eureka* look on her face.

“So that was it!”

“I guess?”

“It's fine then.”

“It's not!”

“Now really, it was good for you.”

There was no way a swinging knock with enough power to send him flying could be good for him, Ryner thought, but instead of debating with her illogical line of thought, he continued.

“Anyway, as I was saying, let's leave the country.”

She nodded.

“I don't really mind.”

After getting her affirmation, Ryner said.

“But before that, we need to understand the current status of Roland..... like the war waged with Nelpha..... and which direction this country will be going is also something we need to be able to foresee.”

“Hm. So, how long will the investigation take?”

“Hn ~ well, one day? If I can capture a soldier and interrogate him, as well talk to some of the people in town, it should be enough, I think. After that, we can proceed to observe the battlefront at Nelpha, which should help us in understanding what Sion is trying to accomplish.”

She stopped in her tracks suddenly,

“So, the next place we are heading to is Nelpha?”

And she turned her sight towards the north.

That was the direction where Imperial Nelpha lay.

Then again, since Roland was located at the southernmost of Menoris continent, any other country would be in the north with

respect to Roland.

Ryner stopped and looked to the north as well.

“Well really, Runa would be fine as well..... but it's still officially an ally of Roland. For us who are currently fugutives wanted by Roland, it would be easier to move in a country having hostile relations with Roland.”

It was doubtful however how long would Runa maintain its alliance with Roland, which was quick in waging a war.

Ryner looked behind him.

Seeing no sign of them, it seemed like they had completely lost their pursuers.

Ryner ended his speed enhancement magic.

As he did so, he felt his muscles loosen considerably. Since this particular magic releases a limiter in his mind to allow his muscles to perform beyond their normal physical limits, he felt extremely fatigued upon ending the spell.

As his strength ebbed away from him, he breathed out a sigh of tiredness. He then looked at Ferris,

“I think it's time for us to get down from the rooftops.”

“Agree. There's a good dango shop nearby anyway.”

“Dango again?”

“Dango is everything to me.”

“..... well, if you can gain happiness from that, it's fine I guess. Then, let's talk while we walk.”

“Right.”

The two of them jumped down from the rooftop and started walking.

Ryner continued.

“Now that it's decided that we are leaving this country, it would really be bad if we don't bring Arua and the rest along.”

The boy called Arua, was previously saved by Ryner and Ferris from certain torture in Runa Empire, and like Ryner is an **Alpha Stigma** bearer. Currently, he and his childhood friend, Kuku, are residing some distance away from Ferris's house.

But Ferris looked doubtful.

“No, won't it be difficult for us to cross the borders while bringing them along? We are currently wanted right? Furthermore the pursuit for us will get even more intense, and if we get attacked, it will be difficult to escape while protecting them at the same time.”

“Yeah. I thought so too..... but since we were the ones who brought them to this country, to leave now without bringing them along would be kind of bad, don't you think? Even though Sion may be kind at heart and may continue to watch out for them but still...”

Well actually, how the current Sion might treat them still remained a thing to be seen.

Ryner wouldn't feel good about it if Sion were to take them hostage in order to threaten him to return to this country.

If that could happen, then taking them along would become a necessity. Though by doing that would make things a lot more difficult.

“Now, what should we do about it?”

Though as Ryner pondered aloud, Ferris looked at him with an exalted expression.

It felt like she was laughing mockingly, knowingly.

And she said.

“Fufun ♪.”

“Now, I know what you are thinking just by looking at your face, there's no real need to laugh out loud in that manner.”

“Fufufu～n ♪.”

“Arghh really ok ok. So, tell me what's on your mind. You have an idea, don't you?”

He asked in a not particularly expectant manner.

She nodded and said.

“How about this?”

“What?”

“Let's seek Iris's help in bringing Arua and Kuku out of the country. How's that?”

She said.

By the way, the girl called Iris, who is not even a full ten years in age, is Ferris's younger sister. Her beauty and bothersomeness are the splitting image of her elder sister. In fact, while she is twice as bothersome as her elder sister and a difficult person to deal with, her strength is the real deal.

Of course, she is not yet at the same level as Ferris, but still as the second daughter of the powerful Eris House, at the age of ten, she should already possess a level of strength that makes her more than a match for any ordinary soldier.

Ferris continued.

“Ever since Arua came to this country, while precociously saying how he's going to protect Kuku, he has been training like crazy. If Iris and Arua work together, crossing the borders shouldn't be a difficult thing. At the very least, it should be much safer than traveling with us who are on the run. Even if they are captured, at most they would be sent back to Sion. I don't think there's any danger to that, so what do you say?”

What a thing it was for Ferris to say that.

Without thinking, Ryner,

“Some, somehow..... somehow today, for the first time, you actually came up with something decent.”

On hearing that, she said happily.

“Are you surprised?”

“Yeah. I am.”

“Then make a more 'surprised' expression.”

“Eh ~, is that some kind of a request?”

“For once, I just said something brillant, shouldn't you be going *Uwaaaaaaaaaaah that's awesomeeeeee Ferris is a geniusssssssss!* and start rolling on the ground.....”

“No way I'm going to do thatttttt, neither am I going to make a comeback on your jokes, I'm kind of tired, so can you please stop digressing? Ever since I got out of prison, thanks to the antics from a certain someone, I'm pretty much drained now.”

Ferris tilted her head to one side,

“A certain someone? Who in the world is that?”

“Well, I'm sure if you search that heart beneath your chest, it would be known to you.”

After Ryner said that, all of a sudden, she gasped. She blushed and with an expression that looked like she just had a realization, she clutched her chest with her hands in a hiding and protective manner.

“Those, those perverted eyes..... what, what in the world are you thinking of doing to my chest!?”

It was again one of her little antics.

And Ryner held up his hand,

“Now seriously, I'm not going to play a fool with you anymore, so please let me off.”

In an instant, she went back to her usual emotionless expression,

“Boring!”

“Now, to say it's boring..... after we get out of this country, I'll play along with you, so for now, can you just bear with it?”

“That's a promise?”

“You really want that so much?”

“Uh-huh. For the past two weeks, with almost no one to talk to..... it had been extremely boring. Let's get out of the country quickly and you can continue to entertain me!”

In a sulky tone she said, and Ryner smiled wryly at her.

So that was it. At the end of the day, she was just feeling lonely.

“So anyway, did you go back to look for Sion during the past two weeks……?”

Maintaing a sulky expression, she nodded.

“No matter how many times I went back, I was chased away. There were like dozens of those disgusting monsters that have their bodies liquidefied…… it was impossible to get close……”

Disgusting monsters with their bodies liquidefied.

Ryner grimaced at that.

During that rainy night, when Sion came to assault Ryner, he brought along those too.

They were made from those vile human experiments.

The sacrifices needed for experimentation to create such super soldiers probably numbered by the dozen, or possibly even by the thousand.

It was a research project inherited from the former Roland.

But that was something that should have been terminated since Sion became king.

It should be something that Sion could not forgive.

However, Sion resumed those experiments. In a place which was out of Ryner's sight. Always smiling like nothing was amiss, he was in fact carrying out those experiments behind his back.

Even though Ryner did not know how much of distress he must be feeling behind them, but he……

He was not the type of person who could easily accept people dying, that was something that Ryner knew best.

Deep distress and despair.

That was what was seen on his face on that rainy night.

The face of someone who was shouldering on a heavy burden.

And now, Sion had already deployed dozens of those abnormal soldiers to guard the castle of Roland.

And Ryner,

“……”

He turned his sight away from Ferris, looked at the streets, and then gazed in the direction of the castle.

Even though it looked as if nothing had changed, this country, without a question, had been completely transformed into something else altogether.

Furthermore, this country was invading a country that should have been its ally, Imperial Nelpha.

And according to Ferris, it's not just the surrendering soldiers, but even women and children were being massacred.

That was something.

“……”

That was something Ryner could not see Sion doing.

But that was already a reality of this country.

That was Sion's reality.

Behind their backs, a reality which he carried upon his shoulders alone.

To kill Ryner.

To continue with the human experiments.

To wage wars on other countries.

And, to let his body be possessed by some kind of unknown monster.

Something that was beyond his imagination was arising in this country.

It was something that needed to be investigated.....

At that moment, he abruptly had a not so pleasant realization and he looked at Ferris.

“Oh shit, Ferris. I just realized something bad.”

She looked back at him.

“What is it?”

“We are going to leave this country right?”

“Uh-huh.”

“And there are some preparations for that right?”

“Yep.”

“But since I wasn't around, my contract with the inn where I was staying should be terminated automatically right? Anyway, Sion was the one paying for it..... and all my belongings..... are probably gone right?”

In spite of what Ryner said, Ferris had a "*are you an idiot?*" questioning look on her face.

“Even if the contract wasn't terminated, there will be people lying in wait for you there. You are a fugitive now, aren't you?”

“Ah, right. So, what am I going to do? I don't have any other clothes with me, you know?”

She promptly replied,

“Well, that shouldn't pose a problem. Since you are a pervert. Even if you run around naked throughout the whole world, it shouldn't be a problem for.....”

“That's not all. On top of that, there's something even worse than that. Without any money now, I can't even buy any clothes.”

At that moment, as if remembering something important, she hit her fist into her other hand.

And Ryner asked.

“Did you just have a sudden stroke of brillance regarding this issue at hand?”

She nodded and then for some reason took on a bullying look and with all her might said.

“This man, such a penniless man arghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

“..... huh, well, it's not totally out of my expectations..... did you really want to say that punchline so much?”

She nodded vigorously.

“That felt unexpectedly good.”

“That's great..... sigh..... so, what about the money?”

“I won't lend it to you.”

“That aside, are you carrying any money right now?”

“Nope.”

“Seriously? You came so far without any?”

She shook her head,

“Not really, I thought I might need to loosen up my purse strings in order to gather information on your whereabouts, so I actually filled up my purse with a large number of gold coins.”

On saying that, even if it's only a little, Ryner could tell that during those two weeks, how much effort she put into in searching for him, and he shrugged his shoulders uncomfortably.

And he asked.

“Well, where is that purse?”

“I don't have it with me now.”

“You left it at home?”

But she shook her head.

“No, I had it just a while ago.”

“And?”

“I left it somewhere.”

“Where?”

“On the lap of the dango shop's Oyaji……”

And then.

And then Ryner remembered the pained look of Oyaji when he shouted "*My debts arghhhhhh!*",

“Ah, ahh. That... can't be helped...”

He said without much thought.

She nodded.

“Yeah. It can't be helped. Well, with that much money, he could easily build not just one, but two dango shops easily……”

“Huh? Aren't you carrying way too much money on you?”

“Yeah. It's my whole fortune.”

“Uwah, you are pretty rich…… well then again, it should be expected of a noble I guess……”

But for her to be willing to part with all her fortune in order to find him, it was indeed……

“……”

It indeed was something that made him feel a sense of guilt.

Ryner, with an obscure expression that looked as if he was smiling bitterly and at the same time as if he was smiling faintly, looked at her.

She faced him,

“Well, most of it was borrowed using your name, so don't worry too much about it……”

“Whaat, you used my name aggaain to borrow money huhhhh!?”

Ryner yelled, but Ferris with a surprised look,

“But that's for the sake of searching for you, isn't it?”

“Well, that's true for that matter..... but still.....”

“And those were the support funds for the dango association.....”

“Eh, what's this? The conversation just took a strange turn?”

“The money that was supposed to be used for a grand dango party for people to have fun enjoying dango in all their meals all day long, that money is gone now!”

“There's nothing fun in thaaattt! By the way, why in the world would you do such a thing!”

Ryner yelled and Ferris, with an incomprehensible expression, looked at him,

“What are you getting so uptight about? It's not the first time I used your name to borrow money right? And it's already at the amount which you can't payback anyway. I just might as well help you borrow more on top it!”

Ferris said with a strong tone.

“Now now, I don't think you need to get so agitated right? Are you seriously mad?”

“Uh-huh. I am mad!”

He looked at her face, which showed no signs of doubt in her defiant reaction,

“..... is that so..... erm..... right..... okay. Well, I guess that's fine then.”

“Fine.”

Her acknowledgment still sounded strong.

And Ryner,

“Is that so..... it's fine?”

While he didn't really completely feel alright with that, at the same time he felt like he could let it pass.

Since they've already come so far, the thought of having one, two, three, four, hundreds, or even thousands of debtors coming after them was way much better than the pursuers of the Roland military.

There were still other things that he needed to think through..... and he went back deep in thought.

In any case, there were a multitude of preparations to be made for the journey, and on top of all them was the issue of money.

Ryner spoke.

“You know, Ferris.”

“Hn?”

“Just now you mentioned that you left your whole fortune with the dango shop Oyaji right?”

“I did.”

“Was that really your whole fortune?”

“It was everything I had.”

“Don't you have any left at home?”

For an instant, she pondered about something before replying,

“It's not as if there's completely none left..... but.”

Ryner nodded.

“There's probably an ambush lying in wait at your house.”

“Yeah. That's something to be expected under such circumstances.”

“Right..... then as things stand, I'm now a penniless man. I could never have imagined that I would become penniless in a country that Sion ruled over.”

He folded his arms in frustration and pondered.

“Now, what should we do now? You didn't bring any change of clothes as well, which is kind of bad. Now that we are going to be traveling in other countries, it's best for you to take off that armor

with Roland's insignia on it.”

As he said that, he looked at her armor.

The Roland emblem was engraved onto the chest area of her armor.

Ferris also looked downwards at her own armor.

“Hm. That's right. This might become a bother from now on.....”

“..... well, that's not only true for within Roland, but as well as within other countries, where a negative view on Roland is held.”

“Then, I'll need a new set of clothes and armor.”

“Yep.”

“And that means we need money.”

“Uh-huh. Money. Now, what should we do about it?”

As he said that, she stopped in her tracks.

Ryner turned around.

“What is it?”

But she did not answer. She was looking at a single shop that was still yet to be opened for business,

“Well, look there.”

She said.

“Huh? What's over there?”

As Ryner said that, he looked at where Ferris was looking.

It was an apparel shop.

A large apparel shop that carries a large amount of merchandise for both men and women.

As he looked at that, he knew what she was thinking about.

Robbery.

To break open that door, robbed the store of its clothes and money,

that was what it was.

That was the worst.

As a human being, this was an act that should be never be condoned.

Besides.

Besides no matter what the reason was, it was something bad.....

“Ah ~, we did this pretty often in other countries, didn't we?”

It was something unpleasant to say, but he couldn't think of anything else. Ferris nodded.

“Uh-huh. We've even assaulted a bank before. That or a noble's mansion..... people who robbed from the poor are called robbers, people who robbed from the rich are called chivalrous thieves!”

What a convenient thing to say for herself, Ryner, without a thought,

“Uwah ~ somehow, somehow that's kind of nostalgic. We did that rather often huh? Even the corrupted Runa church was done in by us.”

“Yep yep.”

For some bizzare reason, given their current circumstances, the two of them started reminiscing their good old days.

“But we seriously became fugitives after what we did then.”

“Uh-huh. But even if we didn't do that, we are already fugitives now. So that was never a problem.”

“On top of that, I was being chased after because of the loans taken.....”

“Yeah. And you were preying on the girls on the streets at night.....”

“Huh, that didn't happen at all, but well, it's fine. So, what should we do? Are we going to rob that apparel store?”

She shook her head.

“If we do that, won't that make us robbers? As a chivalrous thief, I will of course go after the corrupted nobles!”

“Eh? Is that so? Then why are you looking at that apparel store?”

She pointed at a piece of clothing that could be seen displayed through the glass of the apparel store.

It was a one-piece dress that appeared to give the wearer a great degree of freedom in movement. The colors used were bright, and it looked really nice and lovely, a fine piece of apparel indeed. It came with a belt and a pair of boots, and a label that says "*New Item*" was attached to it.

Ryner looked at that and asked.

“Do you want that?”

Ferris nodded.

“You're going to rob the nobles and use their money to buy that?”

Again she nodded.

“But is that really suited for traveling?”

Ryner could see that for a tall woman of her height, if she puts that dress on, the skirt portion might be a little too short for her, but she promptly replied,

“No problem at all.”

“Is that so?”

“Uh-huh. Even if it's really difficult to move in it, I'm still going to have that. Because I really love that dango pattern at the waist part.”

That was what she said.

“Eh? Dango pattern? Is there such a thing?”

Ryner looked at the waist portion of the dress. And saw at that part, rather than dango, were three small polka dots lying in a straight line.

“Ah, so that was the main point.”

“Of course.”

“Now, that should not be in such a matter-of-fact manner.”

“Hm? Is there anything wrong with it?”

“Eh ～ ? Ah ～ ? Well, that dress looks kind of cute, so there isn't anything wrong with it.”

“With this, I'll be constantly in one body and soul with the God of Dango!”

“That's great ～”

“Yep!”

Seeing the amount of contentment she held in her acknowledgment, Ryner smiled wryly and then looked at the man's clothing displayed somewhat towards the interior of the store.

“Well then, I think I'll take that.”

The mannequin he was pointing to was wearing a set of man's clothing that was probably made from the same maker which made the dress that Ferris had chosen.

It consisted of a set of shirt and pants that appeared to give the wearer the same great degree of freedom in movement. Like the dress, it had the same so-called dango pattern logo, but in comparison, it was much smaller and less visible.

It seemed like that logo was the trademark of that maker.

Ferris then said,

“Ohh, it seems like the day when you've converted to become a dango believer has finally arrived!”

With that proclamation, Ryner said.

“After you loot off those nobles, and since you've already chosen something fitting for yourself, you might as well buy something of the same maker for me.”

She returned to a serious look and looked at him.

“Sure. So, in other words, you want to split up the tasks? Then you

will……”

“Yes. I'll look into the current state of affairs of this country. After that, I would decide whether we should be going to Nelpha or Runa based on the circumstances. I'll try to form a plan. And you will take on the task of making preparations for the journey, as well as liaise with Iris on what to do. Is that alright with you?”

She nodded.

“Fine. So how many days from now should we link up?”

Ryner thought for a moment.

It's not a question of how many days he needed to finish his investigation.

It's a question of how many days they could continue remaining in this country.

It was highly likely that Roland would increase the number as well as the strength of the pursuers, which would intensify things.

How should he work this out?

There was not much time for them to do this at a leisure pace.

“As I mentioned earlier, just one day would do. We don't have time to take things slowly.”

Ryner said.

“We'll link up tomorrow morning at eight.”

Ferris nodded,

“Understood. Tomorrow morning at the usual place……”

Ryner responded frantically,

“Ah, that won't do. I don't know which usual place are you referring to. As a matter of fact, do you know how much trouble I had to go through earlier to find you?”

“Hm. Where do we link up then?”

Ryner pondered for a moment, and said.

“Asohld dango teahouse.”

“Oh, Asohld huh! I have yet to taste that tea dango there. Ryner, you are pretty well-informed, aren't you?”

She praised him.

“Uh thanks.”

He acknowledged it without any rebuke. It's not as if he chose that place because of the dango or anything like that.

Towards the north, slightly beyond the measure of land where that teahouse was, along the highway beside it, was the very first road fork. That was why he chose that place.

To the northwest of that road fork lay Nelpha.

To the northeast lay Runa.

Whichever way it was, it was the highway leading out of Roland.

Moreover, because this highway is not too wide and is a roundabout detour, Roland would never use it for sending its troops to Nelpha. That was why he chose that place.

In other words tomorrow.

They would start their journey once they linked up at the tea house, and by afternoon, they would be out of the country.

“……”

In order to save Sion.

In order to save this messed-up country.

Though he was to carry out such a laborious and troublesome task, Ryner did not exhibit any sign of nervousness, nor fighting spirit, and with his usual languid voice,

“Well, Ferris. Let's do it.”

“Right.”

She acknowledged, and Ryner said.

“..... that fool. That stupid Sion, the two of us shall save him.”

She looked at him.

She looked at him with a slightly surprised expression.

And only very faintly.

Only very faintly, she smiled.

“..... right!”

She acknowledged once again.

Chapter 3 - The Moment When Darkness Completely Took Over

Killing everyone.

Killing everyone.

As long as it was an enemy, even if it's women or children, they shall be killed with no mercy.

"....."

That was how it turned out in the end.

He thought.

Just as he previously thought.

Sion Astal became the king, and that was how it turned out in the end.

"....."

That was what Lieutenant General Milan Froaude thought.

With beautiful raven-black hair. With a slender and delicate figure. And wearing a rare black ring on his long slender fingers.

Bearing a face with surprisingly well-ordered features, he possesses a gleaming pair of dark blue eyes that speaks of an unyielding cold darkness.

Those deep, dark-colored eyes seem to despise all they see, making them look like a curse was buried within them.

With those sharp-looking thin pupils of his, he was currently deep in thought on the current state of affairs of this country.

The perfect country that was created by the Hero King Sion Astal.

A beacon of light arising from the former messed-up Roland to

guide this country.

He was the one who could reign supreme over this country, or rather, reign supreme over the whole world, that was what Froaude thought.

And he thought that he would be the one to bear upon himself all the necessary darkness in order to make this a reality.

However.

That was no longer necessary.

His Majesty..... in spite of having taken in the darkness of this entire world, has yet to lose his brilliance.

Killing women.

Killing children.

Resuming the human experiments.

Purging the rebellious nobles.

There was no longer anyone who could go against him or this country.

From another viewpoint, he was a tyrant.

A level of dictatorship that was unmatched previously. He already possesses a level of power that could only be acquired through losing himself.

He already possesses a level of power that can strike fear into the hearts of everyone.

And yet.

And yet, he continued on with the identity of a hero king.

A hero king whom, his people were madly in love with, whom his subordinates were cheering on, and whom even those soldiers created from the human experiments had found a reason to die for, Sion Astal.

That was some unbelievable power.

Charisma.

Popularity.

Reputation.

Fame.

All of these became his 'allies'.

A king born with these qualities.

A king born with the ability to carry both humongous levels of light and darkness.

From a dark corner, Sion Astal emitted a piercing gaze that seemed to be able to smash away all obstacles right in front of him, wherever he looked.

That's why everyone could adore him, and follow him in his madness.

The people.

The country.

The world.

That's why.

"..... that's why I....."

He gazed outside the window.

At the corridor that led towards the throne room, the light from the morning sun was streaming in through the window.

It was as if it was shining on the man who was waiting for him further up front, shining on the future of this country.

Well.

"..... His Majesty may not think so though."

As he said that, a thin cold smile floated on Froaude's lips.

Because he, Sion Astal, was a troubled king.

The invasion of Nelpha must have caused him a tremendous amount of grief. One who looked upon his face could tell.

But that was just a feeling of pain in his heart.

It would not stop him from moving forward.

In spite of the pain in his heart, his determination would not waver.

The massacre of Nelpha was a thing of necessity. Knowing that, if he were a person who was unable to take on an absolute and convicted decision, he would not have been chosen by Froaude as his liege.

Especially ever since the obstacle Ryner Lute was removed, the determination of Sion Astal to move forward became even stronger. As expected, that **Alpha Stigma** monster was a cancer to Sion.

But that was removed.

With determination, Sion moved forward.

"……"

Froaude stopped there.

He had come to the end of the corridor, and was standing in front of the huge, spacious throne room. He bowed his head.

And inside the room.

The man sitting on the throne that could only be seated by the very king of this country, nodded.

"You've come."

"Yes."

Froaude raised his head. In front of him was the Hero King.

Bearing silver hair with a regal feel, and golden eyes that speak of an indomitable spirit which seemed to mesmerize all who look into them.

That light.

Froaude thought.

That light had the power to bury the deep darkness within me……

That was what he thought.

Froaude took a few steps forward and stood just before Sion, then bowed his head again.

"…… you seem to be in great spirits, Your Majesty."

Sion shrugged his shoulders.

"Hardly."

Froaude smiled faintly.

"I know."

"Then, you said that in spite of knowing?"

"Yes."

"A detestable person indeed."

"That's my role……"

"Haha. Is that something that one would say of himself?"

Froaude smiled again. But that was a terribly cold smile.

"And……"

Froaude said.

"I heard you called for me?"

Sion nodded.

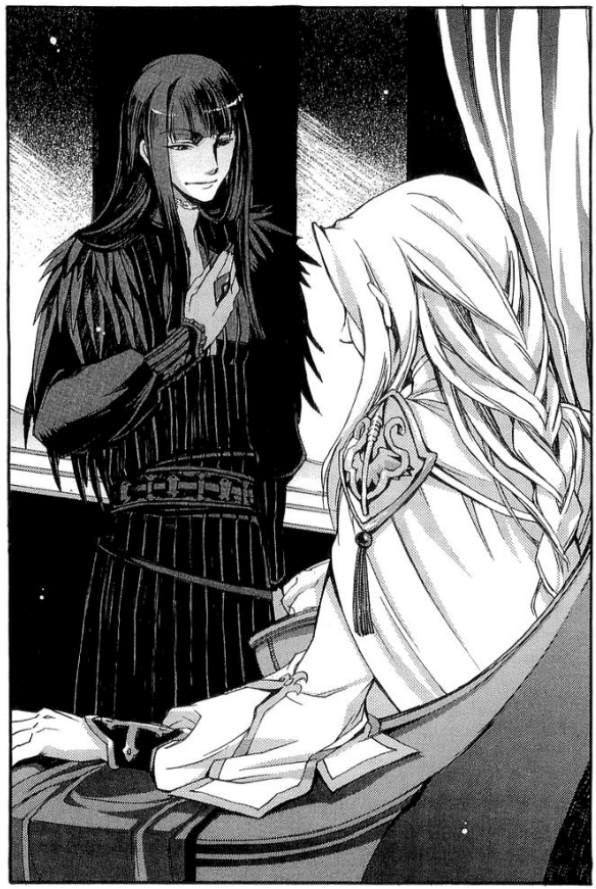
"There's something I want to ask of you."

"Something you want to ask of me?"

At that moment, Froaude searched through his mind in an instant. What was it that Sion wanted to ask of him?

If it's about the invasion of Nelpha, it had already been entrusted to the Field Marshal of this country, Claugh Klom. And if he was the one being entrusted, the task would no doubt be completed without any mishaps. He was a capable man. Hence it should not have

anything to do with the issue on Nelpha, he thought.



Then, was it to discuss with him about plans for invading Runa? It should also be about time to think about the strategy with regards to Cassla, located to the north of this southernmost part of the continent.

Or could it be about the disposal of the remaining resisting puny group of nobles hidden in the shadows.

Or was it about the movements of the Gastark Empire, which is expanding southwards at an alarming rate.

But for each and every one of them, the appropriate countermeasures were already in progress.

If so,

"....."

Froaude stopped the flow of his thoughts and looked at the face of his king.

The troubled expression of his king, and he.

"..... is this about Ryner Lute?"

Sion nodded.

"Yes. With the aid of his comrade, he broke out of prison and escaped."

"I see."

"And on top of that, Miller has been interfering with me."

Froaude smiled.

"That's because Major Miller has yet to know of the thing inside of Your Majesty."

Well actually, Froaude was originally also not aware of that immense amount of power squirming inside of Sion.

But that was something to be expected.

That was a power that a king needed.

Sion Astal was a chosen one, and that's why he was conferred with such a power.

That day.

That day which Sion showed it to Froaude.

And he understood it immediately.

The responsibility, the light, and the darkness that Sion was carrying was greater than what he had thought.

But this king still moved forward.

In order to change the world.

Froaude continued.

“So, for Ryner Lute……”

“Apprehend him.”

“…… on what grounds?”

“A fugitive traitor of the country.”

“Then shall I kill him?”

Sion’s expression did not change. But he could see that his heart was wavering.

Ryner Lute.

Ryner Lute. Ryner Lute. Ryner Lute.

Just as he thought, that man was a cancer. That was what Froaude thought.

Sion said.

“…… ah. It’s okay to kill him. But the best is to capture him alive.”

And Froaude,

“…… understood.”

He acknowledged.

He turned around after that.

“…… in that case, I’ll be on my way.”

He left the throne room.

Ryner Lute.

He was also, perhaps, a chosen one.

For him to bring this amount of distress to the hero king.

But, each and every person has a role to play in the grand scheme of this world.

Sion is one who will change the world.

And.

As food, as fodder, Ryner is one who will become a sacrifice.

It would be terribly troublesome for the fodder to move freely on his own.

After leaving the throne room, Froaude stood in the corridor for a while, and murmured.

“Now, what is the best course of action?”

To kill Ryner Lute.

Or to capture him alive.

While undertaking that mission, he might uncover some new leads.

What in the world is Sion Astal?

And what will we bring about to this world?

The investigation into those questions were mostly already underway.

And quite possibly, Major Rahel Miller must also have been gathering information regarding these matters. And because he must have reached the limits on what he could discover, he tried letting Ryner escape.

He recalled back to what Sion said a while ago.

“With the aid of his comrade, he broke out of prison and escaped.”

The comrade he was referring to was probably that woman known as Ferris.

And it was probably Miller who leaked Ryner’s whereabouts to her. Miller was making efforts in trying to discover Sion’s secret.

“..... such a roundabout manner was really unnecessary.”

Froaude smiled.

If he really wanted to know, he could just ask Sion. Since there was

no longer any need to hide it anymore. But then again, Rahel Miller and his subordinate, Luke Stokkart, are the type of people who would cover up their tracks, and do things covertly. It was this shrewdness of theirs that put Sion in a favorable position to start the revolution to revive this country.

They are excellent men. Men of exceptional abilities.

However, this time round, what they did was indeed a little too indirect, Froaude thought.

Even without doing that.

"..... all they had to do was to ask. Isn't that right? Lucile Eris-san."

He murmured in a very soft voice that could hardly be heard by even someone who were to stand just beside him.

On saying that.

"..... that's right."

A voice replied.

And the voice came from right in front of him. In the center of the corridor right before him, where there was nothing to be seen.

There he was.

Invisible to the eye, there he was.

"....."

The monster.

Froaude smiled.

"Finally, we meet."

"I've always been watching you though."

"I see."

"You are a splendid person. Even when Sion's heart starts to waver, you will undoubtedly guide him back to his rightful path."

Froaude shook his head.

“You flatter me too much. His Majesty..... even if I’m not around, he will definitely get back onto his rightful path and move forward.”

“Ah, you’re right. But even so, you’ve aided him quite a lot, haven’t you? You’ve said it right at the start, didn’t you? The time when you and Sion first met.....”

I’ll shoulder your darkness.

That was what he said.

However, the Sion now seemed to be able to manage both sides of the light and darkness, without losing his brilliance.

Of course, that also meant that it had become much easier for Froaude to carry out his tasks but.

But Lucile said.

“From hereon, you will still continue to move forward right?”

Froaude laughed.

“You must be referring to how I’m going to deal with Ryner Lute, isn’t it?”

Lucile did not reply. However, Froaude felt his acknowledgement.

He continued.

“His Majesty said to either kill or capture Ryner. But are you..... Duke Eris, wishing for something else altogether?”

There was no response.

There was no sign of him.

It was indeed hard to communicate with a monster, Froaude smiled wryly. He put up with it and continued.

“That is of course something along the same line of what I was thinking. Since whenever it comes to the matter of that **Alpha Stigma** bearer, His Majesty’s sensibility gets clouded.”

That’s right. Whenever it came to the matter of dealing with Ryner Lute, Sion could never seem to think rationally.

Was it indeed because he was special in some way?

It was a history repeating itself since ancient times.

The hero and the sacrifice.

Was it due to the circumstances binding the light and the sad demon?

That was something that Froaude could not understand. Rather, there was no real need for him to understand. What he needed to do was just what he thought was necessary and required, well rather, at times something that goes beyond that, and then move forward.

Sion wished to kill Ryner Lute. In order to prevent him from becoming his fodder. In order to prevent him from becoming a sacrifice.

There was of course another method. To kill Ryner Lute, and to once again depend on another **Alpha Stigma**, this was another possibility.

If Ryner Lute could be captured alive, it was also possible to conduct research on him to find a way to save him.

And after saving him, he could substitute another **Alpha Stigma** for him. That was also possible.

But by doing any of those, he would end up going through a large detour.

If that's the case, then how about allowing Ryner Lute to escape to other countries?

In that situation, His Majesty would not be able to save him.

If he could not be saved.

If they were far apart from each other, and without a convenient way to save him, the time would come one day when everything ends.

Sion will devour Ryner and attain his true form.

But.

But that would be still too condoning of him.

Froaude thought.

There were still quite a number of major unknowns present. If assuming Ryner got killed by someone else in the meantime, the plan would fail.

If assuming Ryner discovers something that would allow him to pull Sion out of his current state, the plan would fail.

And if assuming Ryner……

"……"

Well, even though the chance of this happening is one in a million, it's not completely impossible for him to gather strong allies to pose a threat against Sion Astal, or rather, against the entire Roland Empire.

All of that would be for the sake of saving Sion, and not for satisfying his own ego, which will make it not impossible for him to become a great threat.

To see him as not someone who was not just canon fodder for Sion, not just a sacrifice but something beyond that, Froaude shall not let him foil the plan.

Hence,

"…… I shall capture Ryner Lute."

"I see."

Lucile answered.

But without skipping a beat, Froaude continued.

"And I shall imprison him in some place beyond His Majesty's sight, until that day comes. I shall cut his tongue off, and chop off his limbs."

Definitely.

Definitely in such a situation, Ryner would not be able to interfere with Sion anymore.

“It would be fine if his life is spared, isn’t it?”

Froaude asked and Lucile replied.

“Yes. As long as he is alive, with his cursed eyes. He can still become the sacrifice in that state.”

“If so, he won’t need anything below his head.”

“You do say some scary things.”

But in response to Lucile’s words, *I won’t want to hear that coming from you, a monster from which I could only feel an aura of death*, Froaude thought.

Even though he did not say it aloud, his thoughts must have reached Lucile.

Lucile said.

“..... fufu. Am I scary?”

“Yes. You are scary indeed.”

Froaude answered honestly.

“Because you might get killed?”

“No, since the day I was born, I have never feared death.”

“..... then what do you fear of me?”

Froaude laughed at that question. He looked intently at the empty space in front of him and laughed coldly.

“What I fear is your weakness. Duke Lucile Eris. The you who has bestowed His Majesty his influence..... the you who possesses an absolute power..... the thing I really feared most..... is a weakness in you.”

“Horh?”

Lucile made a questioning sound as his curiosity was slightly aroused.

But Froaude thought that it was meaningless to continue this discussion. Whatever the case, in the end, there were too many

things to predict, and some form of uncertainties are sure to exist. Knowing all that, if one could not have the last laugh, one could not claim the ultimate victory.

And Froaude, and Sion, intend to ultimately bring victory to this Roland.

No matter what the obstacles are.

Whether it is Ryner Lute, or Gastark, or even if this Lucile Eris is the one to interfere.

In the end, we will have the last laugh.

Hero King Sion Astal shall rule over the whole of this Menoris continent, and Roland shall have the last laugh.

Well, but until then.

"..... it has been a pretty long conversation. If I spend too much time here, the traitor will get away."

Until then, this person..... this monster Lucile Eris, also has a usable value.

At the same time, in order to be prepared to treat him as an enemy, it is necessary to find a way to kill him.

The way to kill this monster who sees everything from within Roland.

"I shall take my leave here."

Froaude started walking.

Forward.

In the direction from which Lucile's voice resounded.

And in an instant, a cold killing intent was felt from behind him, but Froaude's expression did not change.

Since he was not fearful of death anyway.

He continued walking forward.

"....."

Lucile did not say anything. But, he could feel it. He was not putting on a guard against Froaude. That's to be expected of course. Towards such an insanely powerful monster, Froaude could not even come close to scratching him. He was no way a match for Lucile. That was what he could feel. As long as he continued to remain useful around the monster, it would be fine, that was all he could think of.

But.

"....."

That was fine.

That was no need for Lucile to be wary.

There was no need for him to put his guard on.

For him to think of Froaude as a worthless existence, that was fine in Froaude's perspective.

While creeping around in the dark like a poisonous snake, there was no need for the monster to notice his fangs right now.

Anyway, in the end.

Since in the end, he would discover his fangs with a certain realization.

"....."

Without looking back, a smile floated on Froaude's lips. With that smile, he revealed his white teeth for just an instant. A smile that was cold, like that of a devil.

At least for now, as long as he didn't realize.....

"....."

All of a sudden.

"..... you got it all wrong. Even I, am afraid of a human like you."

From behind Froaude, Lucile whispered close to his ear. At a distance where he could almost touch him.

On the spur of moment, Froaude turned towards that direction.

As he did that, right in front of him, was a strikingly beautiful face of a man with blond hair. That monster, with a smile, was peering at Froaude.

He was peering into his heart.

He understood with just a single glimpse.

This man standing beside him did not seem like an untouchable apparition.

He looked nothing like a insanely powerful monster.

But still, those were his words. In a mocking manner. As if to ridicule him.

“That’s why I am putting my guard on. Against your strength. Against your fangs. Against your poison.”

Even though he said it lightly, he was serious.

Froaude seemed to shake at that.

It seemed like he was shaking from despair.

Even while he possesses such a level of power, there was no sign of haughtiness. There was no sign of arrogance. If so, what should he do? Perhaps, there was really no weakness attached to him.

If so, what should he do?

Froaude seemed to be shaking.

“……”

He seemed to be shaking.

However, that shaking certainly did not stem from fear.

It was from delight.

A feeling of delight from seeing a darkness that was deeper and darker than that of his.

Such a monster.

Such an incredibe monster.

"....."

Is he going to kill me.....

As that thought floated in his mind, he appeared to shake with an uncontrollable sheer delight.

"..... haha. You must be joking. I'm not going to make an enemy out of you. If we were to come to blows, I would just get killed in the end."

"Heh. Is that so?"

"Yes. That is so."

But that was a lie.

I will one day kill him. It will be necessary for me to do so. The reason for that is because he will become an unnecessary existence.

This monster, such a monster; the world does not need the likes of him.

Therefore, I would be taking in the darkness present within him. I will bear even this darkness. It is just as I've said right at the start.

I alone shall shoulder all the darkness of the Hero King, Sion Astal.

"....."

That was what Froaude thought.

He would surpass this darkness, and stretched his hand towards a deeper, darker place.

Somewhere deeper, and darker.

As dark as he could, as deep as he could, in order to increase the brilliance of Sion Astal.

And that brilliance shall bury my darkness.

"..... I will not oppose you. It's my principle not to do anything that is meaningless."

"Fufu. Is that so?"

"Yes."

“Well, if that’s what you insist, then it’s fine for now.”

“Then, may I?”

“Sure.”

Froaude bowed his head once more, and started walking.

He could feel his gaze on him from behind.

The gaze of a monster.

But it’s not the time to turn around and look back.

It’s not the time to kill him yet.

Thus, without looking back.

“……”

He started thinking about another prey that he needed to hunt right now.

The situation was at its worst.

Cruel. Dirty. Tragic. Despondent. Everything and anything in sight was so.

But that was not something out of the ordinary.

Since there was no battlefield that is free from those things.

“……”

He looked over the scenery before him, and grimaced.

It was a scene of piled-up dead bodies in a sea of blood.

There was no sign of life anywhere.

Since his orders were to spare no one.

That did not just apply to soldiers.

To kill all living, even women and children, those were his orders.

"In order to show the world the might of Roland, in order to let them know the consequences of opposing Roland, massacre them all."

Those were Sion's orders, and as such, those were Claugh's very orders.

That's why right before him, there was nothing but dead bodies.

Belonging to the angry soldiers, crying families, despaired lovers. The nobles, the populace, humans, animals, regardless of status or gender.

There was only death.

Even though this was the first time he had given out such thorough orders to kill everyone, he seemed to be at ease.

No, perhaps, it's wrong to say so.

It was the same as always.

Whether it comes to killing children, adults, women, men, or anyone else, it was the same as always,

"..... disgusting....."

Claugh Klom seemed to be spitting out those words.

With flaming red hair, sharp red eyes. Donning a set of steel armor, and Roland's military uniform.

The closest aide to the Hero King, Sion Astal, the Field Marshal of Roland Empire.

From within Roland to the neighbouring countries, there is none who has never heard of his name.

But that fame was not gained from his position as a Field Marshal, but rather as a death god who appears on the battlefield.

Whichever battlefield the death god goes to, a rain of blood will follow.

Riding like the wind through the enemy ranks, and soaking his right arm with the enemy's blood, a man to be feared by all.

Just by seeing his figure on a battlefield.

Just by seeing the tattoo on his right arm, the enemy is bound to lose their morale and be thrown into confusion from the overwhelming fear arising from just that alone.

That's the reason for that.

That's the reason why even when told *"for the Field Marshal to be at the frontlines, are you crazy?"* in an attempt to stop him, Claugh just shook it off and came all the way here.

Since just by using his name, some of the enemy might lose their fighting spirit and flee, which would make it possible to minimize the sacrifices.

However.

"....."

Claugh looked over the land before him.

He looked over the piled-up bodies.

And with a sad look, he grimaced.

He was now pretty much north from the borders that divide Roland Empire and Imperial Nelpha, within the territory belonging to a noble known as Count Terens.

To be precise, he was now assaulting its largest town. And further up front, were Count Terens's castle and fortress, where he was making his stand.

By the way, before this, Claugh had already taken over the land of two other nobles, and on top of that, within Terens's territory, he had completely leveled five villages and two towns.

Thus, once this town and that fortress fall, the connected territory that leads all the way back to Roland, in other words, the defense lines that Nelpha had against Roland would have all crumbled.

All that had taken one week.

In just one week, Claugh had killed many of Nelpha's populace.

The number of people killed during that period, was already something he didn't want to think about.

The disparity in strength was evident, and there was no way Nelpha could stand up to Roland.

Rather, since the merger with Estabul Kingdom, there was no country in the south of this continent that could stand up to Roland Empire.

But even so, during this one year after the merger, Roland did not slow down in its pace to move forward.

Sion Astal had been preparing for the upcoming wars during this one year……

Well, rather.

It was not really for these wars, in fact it's only starting now, all of those efforts in increasing military might were preparations to wage war against the entire world.

Training soldiers. Conscripting soldiers. Magic research.

And the human experiments.

At any rate, Sion has acquired a considerable amount of power.

And thus there had been a fair amount of accomplishments within the country of Roland.

He had acquired from the former broken Roland, which previously existed merely for the pleasure of the nobles, a large amount of data on the unthinkable human experiments which were left behind, and above all else, put a stop to the tyranny of the nobles, brought back peace and freedom to the lives of the people who had suffered under the former rule.

Normally, the build up of military power would have placed a heavier burden on the people in taxation, but Sion instead funded it through the coffers of those nobles who had continued to indulge in their extravagant lifestyle.

And in the end, it was possible to amass a huge army to the benefit of the country.

Under the rule of a righteous king, Roland has become something else altogether, growing into a great powerful country.

"....."

And right here, right now, assembled an army with an extraordinary high morale.

These were not your everyday troops, but strength-enhanced soldiers from the human experiments, a product of the past one year of magic research and training, a hybrid army made up of both Roland and former Estabul's soldiers.

There were ten thousand of them here.

However, with just that ten thousand alone, Claugh was ordered by Sion to decimate Nelpha's eighty-eight thousand strong army.

And that was what he had been doing.

He was already close to annihilating Nelpha's defense lines.

The casualties incurred on this side so far, was only two.

Faced with this abnormal army from Roland, Nelpha was already losing their will to fight.

Thus this war was already.

"..... it's over."

Claugh murmured.

Rather, it had to end. So far, it had been going according to Sion's calculations, by demonstrating Roland's might, and showing Nelpha the massacres, they had obtained surrender after surrender before Nelpha's main force was sent out.

By doing that, even if the populace had to be killed initially, the loss of lives could be minimized at the end of the day.

This was the same as those human experiments.

Even if a large number of people had to be sacrificed for the human experiments, in the end, if it was possible to overwhelm other countries with merely ten thousand troops, the loss of lives could be reduced.

And the result of all that could already be seen.

This Count Terens served as a good example.

Even though up till this point in the territory, troops had been sent out for defense, the bulk of them had fled almost immediately. They fled and left behind the people they were supposed to protect. Count Terens must have already abandoned his fortress as well.

Abandoning the wailing commoners, he had fled.

Even so, Claugh would definitely not relax his attacks.

This was where it would be decided.

The killing of Nelpha's people shall end here.

It definitely will end here.

Therefore,

"..... spare no one."

Claugh said in a low, dark voice.

The order was passed down quickly. The troops moved in a perfect orderly manner. That is to say Roland's troops.

Past the piled-up bodies, from the almost completely wrecked town, the soldiers moved forward.

Only four hours were probably needed for the entire castle and fortress to be overrun by Roland's troops.

There would be more mountains of dead bodies created.

"..... really."

Claugh, for another time, said.

"It's really a disgusting way to fight."

But, since it was necessary, he had to do it.

Sion had been for the past one year, fighting in this manner alone.

And now, together with his other subordinates, they had to answer to his resolve. As the king of Roland, Sion could have pushed all the

dirty work to his subordinates.

Well, before the army was dispatched, when Claugh made that remark, Sion,

“If that’s the case, then why are you heading to the frontlines? You can just sit back from behind and leave the dirty work to your men, can’t you?”

And so on and so forth, he said.

And at the end, he said the following.

“..... sorry for making you do the dirty work.”

As he recalled Sion’s tired and sad looking face during that time, Claugh just smiled faintly.

“..... bummer. That idiot always tries to take on everything all by himself.....”

At that moment, Claugh, for a single time, turned around and looked behind him.

Towards the south.

The south where Roland is.

Just as he thought, at this kind of distance, it was impossible to see Roland’s castle.

The sky was clear. Even though it seemed like from the southwest, dark clouds were floating towards here, well, before the rain comes, the battle in this land will have ended by then.

Claugh made a small sigh.

And at that moment.

“Your Eminence Field Marshal Claugh!”

The familiar voice came from northeast, the opposite direction he was looking at, and he turned towards there.

And there, was a horse galloping towards here, with a young official riding it.

He has golden hair, and a pair of intelligent looking eyes. Though he is not really tall, it was clear that he has a firm and toned body.

It was Shuss Shirazz.

While six years younger than Claugh at a young age of nineteen, Shuss was someone who had been through countless battles with him, a long-time trusted aide.

He was one who could analyze a situation calmly, and was in charge of gathering intelligence.

Even now, he had been investigating the reactions of Nelpha in response to this particular attack from Roland, and had finally returned.

Shuss stopped his horse before Claugh, got off, and knelt before him.

“I’ve returned, Your Eminence.”

Claugh frowned at him,

“Stop the ‘Your Eminence’ thing.”

“But.”

“That’s enough. How long have you been following me around? All soldiers are now out. So stop mimicing the behaviour of others.”

In response to those words, Shuss made a slightly troubled face.

“However, we are now on the battlefield..... Your Eminence.”

Claugh shook his hand in a fed-up manner.

This person has always been like that. His over-seriousness, is it a bad quality or a good quality, no, it definitely has to be a bad quality.

Claugh gave up and asked.

“And?”

“Yes sir. There are a total of four reports, one good, one bad, and two interesting ones.”

“I see. So, which one do you want to start with?”

Shuss seemed to think for a moment, and made a mischievious face.

“Then, I shall start with the good report.”

“Haha, so you want to save the bad report for the last, and leave me depressed? You have a surprisingly bad personality.”

Shuss smiled.

“Just like my superior.”

“Which superior are you referring to?”

“Hm, who is it again? I seem to remember him having red hair and an iron-like body.”

Shuss looked intently at the red-haired Field Marshal of Roland.

But Claugh,

“Who the heck has red hair hrm. Calne?”

What a thing to say, and Shuss smiled.

“No, I don’t remember Major General Kaiwal having anything like red hair..... well let’s leave that aside for now.”

“Yeah. We will do just that. That guy has a pretty bad personality. And on top of that, he’s a lecher who likes other people’s wives.”

“Haha. I won’t deny the fact that his overzealous interest in women is something undesirable though..... Major General Kaiwal probably is sneezing right now, don’t you think?”

“And that would get him dumped because it feels dirty to be sneezed on.”

“Yeah yeah.”

Both of them laughed.

By the way, the person known as Calne Kaiwal, like Claugh, has been a subordinate of Sion since the old militaristic days, and even right now, alongside with Claugh, is called the left hand of the Hero King, and even so, since he is around the same age as Shuss and they have known each other since back then while following Sion, they are on particularly good terms and can joke around with no

reservations at all.

However, Calne is a Major General.

Shuss is still a Second Lieutenant.

The reason was because Shuss had rejected all promotions. In order to bear less responsibilities so that he could continue to serve Claugh, and that's the reason why he's here right now.

Claugh and Calne are serving Sion.

But, as for Shuss, he chose Claugh as the man he would follow to the bitter end.

And even this time round, he had chosen to follow Claugh to this dirty dishonorable battlefield.

Even though Claugh had told him that it was better not to come along, he just smiled and rejected the advice flatly.

"It was for this that I joined the army. This is my country. In order not to show this terrible scene to my dead family again. In order not to show the terrible scene that had befallen Roland before, I shall be the first to bear witness to all of these."

What a thing to say.

You are an overly-serious man. If Claugh called him an overly-serious fool, Shuss would just respond in a joking manner,

"Ahaha. That's quite true. I'm a very serious guy. In order to protect the superior who is even more serious and more foolish than me, and who would throw himself away like an ornamental stone, I'm going along. That's because you are an important person that Roland cannot do without. I have to be there to save you from dying, at least for one time as a substitute."

And when Claugh said *don't mess around with me, if you die before me, I'm gonna kill you*, Shuss merely grinned.

"Haha. If I die, you won't be able to kill me, right?"

And only smiled.

"....."

But he understood what this fool was saying.

He too wanted to dirty only his own hands.

If by doing that, they could save someone else, it's enough.

For that to happen, that's why we are here.

"..... and?"

Claugh asked.

"Well then, shall we start with the good report?"

Shuss nodded.

"The head of Imperial Nelpha..... has decided to surrender to Roland."

"....."

That was a report that Claugh had been waiting for impatiently.

To make Imperial Nelpha surrender with the least number of sacrifices, and also to demonstrate Roland's might to Cassla and Runa, which will give an advantage to Roland in the near future.

Regarding Nelpha's expected surrender after this, everything should have been going according to plan.

However.

Claugh squinted his eyes.

Given the current circumstances, he did not get the feeling that everything would be going well for certain.

The truth was that Imperial Nelpha was currently split into two factions from within.

The first belonged to the benevolent king who had agreed to the alliance with Roland, Gread Nelphi, and the nobles who followed him.

The second was the Anti-Roland noble faction who see the act of Estabul Kingdom merging with Roland into a larger power as a threat. This faction was formed by the First Prince of Nelpha in

order to increase his influence. And while King Gread Nelphi was bedridden from illness, in the name of the King, he might have moved his army southward to invade Roland if not for Roland's preemptive strike.

Among these two factions, whose head was the one that decided on the surrender.

Well, one could make a guess.

"Was Gread Nelphi the one who put out the surrender?"

Claugh said, and Shuss nodded.

"Yes. Even though he is in his old age, he is still the one who has rebuilt Imperial Nelpha in just one generation."

"He could immediately tell the difference in strength between Roland and Nelpha, and how unproductive it was to spill unnecessary blood. A wise monarch indeed."

"Yes."

"Then, this war is already over."

Even as Claugh said that, his expression did not relax.

"But, you still have something bad to report right?"

Shuss nodded quietly.

"So, what's the bad news?"

"King Gread Nelphi....."

On hearing just that, Claugh assumed a troubled expression.

"..... is he dead?"

"Yes. Immediately after declaring the surrender."

"Because of old age?"

Even though Claugh didn't really think that was the case, he asked anyway.

As expected, Shuss shook his head.

“He was killed.”

By who? But he didn’t bother asking. He must have been killed by his son from the opposing faction.

Shuss continued.

“King Nelphi offered his head, as well as the imprisonment of his successor, Prince Starnel, as a proposal to end this war but……”

By the way, Starnel was the one who formed the Anti-Roland faction, the prince who raised an opposing flag towards King Gread Nelphi.

“And Starnel didn’t really like the surrendering proposal put forth by King Nelphi right?”

“Yes.”

“Then, he killed his own father to save himself.”

Shuss nodded.

“Thinking that his imprisonment in Roland will undoubtedly lead to his death, in a frenzy, he killed his father, so it seems.”

“What a stupid prince.”

Claugh smiled wryly.

But the prince’s thinking was on the right track.

There was no intention of sparing any of the royal family in this war.

They were to kill all of the royal family and announced it.

Because Nelpha obstructed Roland and resisted, even if it’s only once, they would have to kill all of the royal family.

However, if right from the beginning Nelpha had surrendered, the royal family would be inducted into Roland’s nobility, and would be able to keep their lives and status.

This would have been a befitting result.

The decision to go to war or not lay with the nobles and the royal

family. And if the royal family had decided to allow the invasion of Roland, thereby retaining their lives and status, what would then happen?

Making a choice that would be unlike that of the benevolent lord, Gread Nelphi, who can use his own life to protect his people.

In order to secure their own lives, they would definitely surrender.

Though that, in certainty, would reduce the fighting and deaths.

For now, in order to achieve the ultimate end where there is less loss of lives, I'm sorry but we have to make an example out of you, Nelpha.

The orders from Sion was to kill all who were related to the royal family within the order of the second degree.

And Gread Nelphi must have been aware of that. But apparently, he's attempting to bargain against that. By offering his own head, he had hoped to bargain for his son's life.

That's why the surrender came so promptly.

Currently, only the frontline defense had fallen. Nelpha still has seventy thousand strong to be deployed.

By surrendering early, Nelpha has effectively helped Roland to display their overwhelming power to the entire world, so would Roland agree to the bargain?

That was indeed a wise judgement.

That would really help convey the right message.

In just two weeks, Nelpha had fallen to Roland's invasion.

By surrendering early, it's possible to secure one's life and status which would have been taken away otherwise as long as one belongs to the royal family. It's really better to surrender earlier..... that was the message that could be conveyed to other countries.

This would really have resulted in the best possible end of minimum life loss across the board.

Gread Nelphi has died. Killed by his own son, the prince who understood nothing and could only think of saving himself.

“So what did the foolish son do after killing his father?”

Shuss made a tired face to that question.

“He ordered ten thousand troops to retaliate against Roland……”

“I see. So you’re sacrificing ten thousand soldiers to slow us down while escaping on your own. A complete failure of a noble.”

But Shuss did not acknowledge that. He only looked at Claugh with a dark face.

“Well actually, Starnel has not escaped yet.”

“Oh, so what’s he up to then?”

As Claugh asked, Shuss took a deep breath, to find the right words.

And he said.

“He massacred……”

“What!”

Without thinking, Claugh exclaimed in shock.

But Shuss just continued on.

“…… he intended to kill all the people, and take what he could to make his escape northwards.”

“……”

Claugh had nothing to say to that.

That was the worst possible development.

To think that he couldn’t read his enemy up till here. Killing his own people, stealing from them and then making his escape, what a rotten way of doing things.

This will lead to even more sacrifices, more so than a straight-up assault into the capital.

On top of that, there is no one of authority left to make an official surrender to Roland. In other words, Nelpha will not be surrendering at all.

And because there is no official statement of surrender made, Roland can only continue its killing spree.

Killing those retaliating ten thousand soldiers who are well aware of their imminent deaths, killing the populace, and completely razing Nelpha.

Thinking of that, Claugh,

"....."

He was really at his wits' end.

That's why he hated wars.

Since as always, everything and anything about wars is merciless, dirty, tragic, and sad.

Even though they had already assumed the worst, this was something that was one step beyond that.

From now onwards.

From now onwards, it wasn't possible to change the direction of the events. From hereon, there was still value in the razing of Nelpha and more slaughtering.

In order to reduce the loss of lives in future wars.

Even though this in itself was already a terrible war, it was all in the name of avoiding more terrible wars in the future.

There was no other choice. *Shall we get on with this*..... as Claugh was about to utter those words, Shuss continued on.

"However, to add on, there is something else that proved to be interesting."

"Huh?"

Claugh looked at Shuss. Claugh recalled what Shuss said earlier, about one good report, one bad report, and two interesting ones.

"Something else that proved to be interesting?"

Shuss nodded at Claugh's query.

“It’s about the earlier report on the ten thousand soldiers that were supposedly heading southwards.”

“Uh huh.”

“They aren’t coming here after all.”

“Excuse me? What do you mean by that?”

“Well..... for some reason, there is a rumor that a man by the name of Toale Nelphi is leading those soldiers eastwards.....”

“Toale.....?”

Claugh queried as he seemed to have heard the name from somewhere.

Shuss nodded.

“It’s Toale Nelphi. The grandson of the deceased Gead Nelphi.”

As he said that, Claugh remembered.

Froaude mentioned it before he marched his army.

"While there is hardly any talent existing in Nelpha that could pose a threat to Roland at this point in time, there is still one individual whom you must watch out for. His name is Toale Nelphi. He is the son of Prince Starnel and his commoner mistress, and though he is currently away from the center of power of this country, he is sympathetic to his country, and in the event where it seems likely that he would be given power and authority..... it is my recommendation that you crush him first."

That was what he said.

And because of what Froaude said about that Toale guy, he was wondering what kind of person is he, *I see.*

You’ve come forth to change the direction of the incoming troops.

The son of a commoner mistress.

By the way, that was the same for Sion.

“A weed growing in the wilderness..... is stronger?”

Shuss shrugged his shoulders at what Claugh said.

“But even if Sion-san grew up in the wilderness, he is more of a flower, isn’t it?”

“Right. He is like a pretty-looking, insect-eating plant?”

“Now ～. At the very least, can you compare him to a rose instead? A thorny one or something like that.”

“Yeah ～. Indeed, it is more apt to describe Sion as a rose. For the slip of my tongue, should I slap my lips?”

To those words.

For some reason, Shuss face contorted. He was shaking as if to keep something bottled up within him. In the end, he burst out laughing.

“Please, don’t say something weird! It brought a weird image to my mind.”

His face was bright red from the pent-up laughter directed towards Claugh.

With a sidelong glance, Claugh considered the situation.

It seemed like the situation was not as bad as it seemed.

According to Froaude, the guy called Toale has a high popularity and seems to be an able man.

"I once wanted to eliminate him. Well, thanks to a certain odd duo of a magician and swordswoman, I had to abort it....."

However, for now, Claugh was grateful to that magician and swordswoman. Since if Toale had been killed by Froaude then, this current development would not have been possible.

There still remained a path of less bloodshed to the end of this war.

If Toale became the king of this country and announced his surrender.

“.....”

And then after that, if they have Toale killed.

With the head of Toale Nelphi, the war could be ended.

"..... in either case, there is still a lot more killing to be done."

Claugh muttered to himself.

He had a sudden realization and looked in the direction of Shuss.

"..... but then again, you are pretty kind."

Shuss was surprised by those words and asked.

"Huh? Why's that?"

"About the reports."

"Yes?"

"All in all, even though what we are about to do from now on is still something bothersome, thanks to the order of your reports, I could sense some glimmer of hope at the end."

Shuss beamed at that.

"I'm most happy to be able to please Your Eminence."

"Like I said, drop the 'Your Eminence'."

"Well, Your Eminence, there is still one more interesting thing to report though."

"Like I said."

But Shuss just ignored that and continued.

"And that is something concerning Your Eminence."

"Huh? Concerning me?"

"Yes."

"What's that?"

Shuss then pointed at Claugh's arm.

His right arm.

He pointed to his right arm, which was of an entirely pitch-black

color.

It looked completely different from the former arm that was filled with red tattoos, the arm which earned him the nickname of ‘Crimson Finger Claugh Klom’.

That former arm was devoured by a monster bearing the Cursed Eyes known as **Iino Dwoe**.

That’s why the arm he has now is an artificial arm. A cursed artificial arm.

It was a special arm regrown from a <Forbidden Curse>.

Even though he has already grown accustomed to his new arm and could use it as if it were originally his own, normally, that arm covered in pitch-black would be attempting to kill its own host.

So to speak, it was something born out of one of the crazy human experiments carried out in Roland.

Even though the previous arm with red tattoos came from a similar origin, this time round, it was something even more powerful and more monstrous than before.

After looking at his own pitch-black arm, Claugh asked.

“So, what’s the thing about me?”

Shuss replied in an amused tone.

“Your nickname has changed.”

“Ah. Well, my arm isn’t red anymore. So, what has ‘Crimson Finger Claugh’ become? Did it become something that sounds more adorable?”

“Haha. An adorable name won’t really suit Claugh-san.”

“Well, it doesn’t really need to be adorable though..... but why the hell do I keep getting nicknames attached to my name?”

“Because you are popular, isn’t that so?”

But Claugh merely snorted laughingly.

“Don’t be foolish. It’s a murderer’s nickname. A name of notoriety.

So, what has this name of notoriety changed to?"

After a mild laugh, Shuss said.

"The Black Hand Death God."

Death God huh.

Claugh looked at his black arm again and thought.

Even though he had yet to release the cursed power of his arm on the battlefield, it amounted to the same thing.

This very arm had already taken tons of lives.

He, who did not wish to keep remaining in his current safe haven away from the direct fighting, was well aware of that.

While he was in his safe haven, people were dying. He had witnessed much of that.

And more of that was to come.

"..... hn."

At that moment.

Claugh's black arm, the one nicknamed **Black Hand**, moved in a flash.

That hand caught hold of a knife seemingly thrown from somewhere.

It's not as if he was looking in the direction from which the knife was thrown. He merely sensed the flow of a killing intent and reacted accordingly.

If a normal person were to have seen this, he or she would have called him a monster.

A monster with flaming red hair donning steel armor.

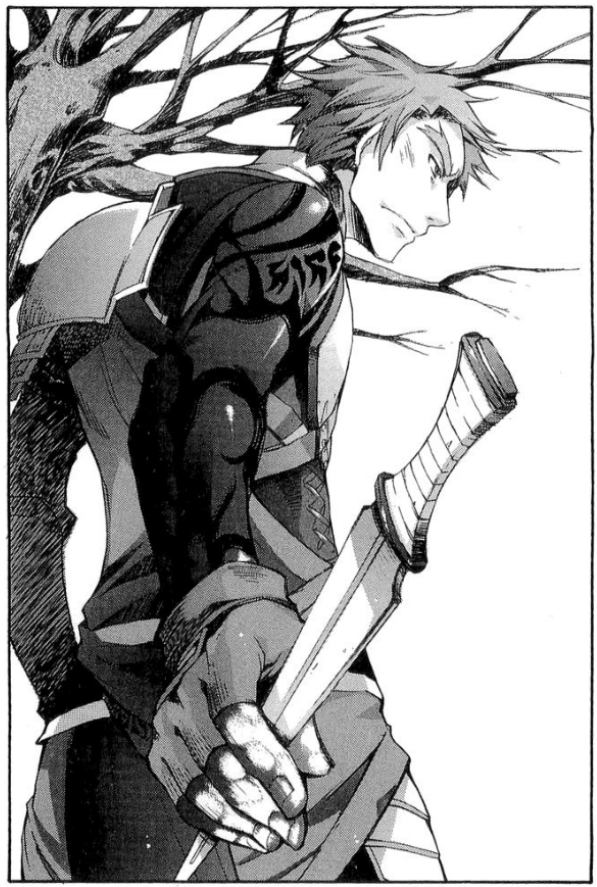
The death god with a black hand who have appeared on the battlefield.

And then Claugh threw the knife back in the direction from which it came. His throw was powered with a force many times stronger

than when it came flying towards him, with a deadly accuracy.

A cry was heard.

Then came the sound of a person falling to the ground.



However, he did not turn to see who it was.

Whether the culprit was a man, a woman, an adult, or a child, it did not matter.

In any case, he had only to kill.

From hereon, he had to keep on killing the people of Nelpha for a

while longer.

That's why he did not bother to look.

Because he thought there was no reason to do so.

He merely.

"....."

He merely, if only a little.

Made a tired and sad face.

"..... I'm sorry."

The death god of the battlefield murmured with a strained voice.

Chapter 4 - The Moment To Sunder That Darkness

The light had receded.

Sometime in the middle of the night, covered in darkness, at some facility of Roland.

Along the corridor of that facility was Ryner, running at an unbelievable rapid speed, different from his usual languid behavior.

With wide open eyes, and a vermillion five-point pentacle over the center of his black pupils, he was looking intently at the unfolding magic right before him.

At the other end of the corridor.

There were three guards in the process of launching spells in his direction.

Rather, one of them had already completed his spell.

That guard, who appeared to be the most skilled out of them all, had cast **Kuuri**, which Ryner dodged.

And that guard was stunned,

“To, to dodge **Kuuri** at this distance……”

While hearing himself called a monster again, something which he was used to already, Ryner ran.

“It’s your own fault for missing at this distance.”

While he said that, another guard was about to complete his magic inscription.

This time round, it's **Kurenai**.

But Ryner is many times faster, and had constructed a completely different spell structure.

While running, he promptly finished inscribing the glowing

symbols.

In the midst of his opponent's incantation.

"WHAT I SEEK IS BURNING FIELDS > > > KURE....."

In the midst of that,

"WHAT I SEEK IS WATER MIST > > > MISUMI!"

In the center of Ryner's magic inscription, water started gathering into a state of high pressure, and it burst forth in the form of a jet stream towards the enemy.

The guard who was about to launch **Kurenai** could only utter the following.

"What kind of absurdity....."

On saying that, the guard who was about to fire off **Kurenai**, as well the guard who cast **Kuuri**, were both caught in the strong jet of water and sent crashing into the wall, consequently passing out.

Though Ryner had already gone easy on them to the point where they would not die from his attack, that force must have broken several of their bones.

Usually, Ryner would have gone even easier on them, but today he simply did not have that kind of luxury.

In order to prevent them from calling for reinforcements, it was necessary to knock them out in one shot.

And that's because this place.

"....."

Ryner scanned the surrounding area with just his eyes.

While there wasn't much visible light, he could make out the black rocks that were used to lay the walls of this place, a building which resembled a prison.

This was one out of many buildings which form the intelligence center of Roland.

Though he had probably chosen one of the least guarded places to

infiltrate, this was still the heart of the enemy grounds.

If reinforcements were to come, even if it's Ryner, getting killed here was not an impossibility.

That's why he increased the power of his magic, but.

“……”

Ryner looked in the direction of the remaining guard,

“…… did I go too far? But, but, I’m already doing my best to hold back. Sorry.”

He said it with an awkward expression.

And he started running towards the last remaining guard.

That sole guard was already making his escape, running in the opposite direction to call for reinforcements but,

“I won’t let you get away ～”

Ryner gradually closed the distance between them.

If someone familiar to him were to see him, they would ask, *why are you running so fast, don’t you always move like a turtle?*. That was the extent as to how fast he's running.

Knowing he would get caught up soon, the guard had made a small sound and took out a knife from his waist belt. He then turned around and threw it at Ryner.

But Ryner promptly,

“Hoi.”

He stopped the knife.

“Thanks for that.”

He kept the knife in his own belt.

The guard now had a look of utter despair on his face.

“…… what, what the hell was that…… what the hell is this guy…… why is this monster attacking Class Two Intelligence Center……

damn it!”

And not knowing when to give up, the guard drew a glowing magic symbol to attack his pursuer,

“Too slow.”

Ryner said as he caught up with him.

He had put his own finger into the magic inscription drawn by the guard, and changed its structure. He recklessly changed it to something that he just thought of, completed the inscription and chanted,

“WHAT I SEEK IS, erm, something like, SMOKE, I guess > > > KEMURI!”

That was what he chanted.

As he did that, a cloud of smoke started forming at the center of that inscription, blinding the guard.

“I, I can’t see anything!?”

The guard said with a frightened voice.

And beside him,

“U, uwah, can’t see a thing.”

Having his own visibility taken away, it was a complete failure.

“This is kinda bad.”

While saying that, he searched for the guard’s presence.

The guard seemed to be running away.

“Some, someone……”

The guard raised his voice, about to call for help.

But,

“Please don’t call for reinforcements.”

Ryner grabbed him from behind, strangled him for a while, and he lost consciousness.

The guard fell to the ground.

And the fight came to a close.

Ryner looked at the surrounding smoke, and attempted to decipher its structure with his **Alpha Stigma**.

“Ah..... I made this recklessly without thinking much, and it’s surprisingly troublesome to dispel.”

While saying that, his finger started dancing in the air again.

He drew a glowing magic symbol, and constructed the corresponding dispelling magic for the smoke that had completely filled up his surroundings.

“WHAT I SEEK IS..... erm, what shall I call it, it would be nice if it sounds real cool, just now it was a little too mundane..... erm, well, WHAT I SEEK IS ah, DISPERSAL CLOUD > > > KI, KIERO!”

In the end, he’s a person without much artistic sense in liguistics after all.

“..... well, erm, hm. What the heck was that again?”

He heaved out a huge sigh.

Supposedly the stronger the words, with one’s will, that are used for invocation will correspond to a stronger magical power, well then again, that’s the research arena of an academic scholar of magic,

“It's not like I'm some scholar of magic anyway, so that’s fine right?”

Though he said that, there wasn’t anyone around to answer him.

The smoke disappeared as it got sucked in by the magic he created. His surroundings returned to their previous state.

The dark corridor was lit merely by the moonlight streaming in through the window.

He was currently standing in the corridor of the sixth floor of a building belonging to the military, the Class Two Intelligence Center of Roland Empire.

By the way, he originally wanted to infiltrate the Class One

Intelligence Center instead, but it was heavily guarded and seemed impossible to penetrate, and that's why he changed his target to here.

At any rate, that Class One building was filled with those mutated monster guards with liquidified bodies. He remembered a number of those guards who were supposedly dismissed from the mage knight battalion when Sion ascended the throne.

If he had tried infiltrating there, he would die, and that he was certain of, so that's why he chose this place instead.

In spite of this, that was not to say that the guards here were weak or less watchful.

"....."

Ryner looked at the fallen guard at his feet.

Before coming to this floor, Ryner had already steathily, without causing any ruckus of any sort, disposed of fifty such guards and a dozen working personnel, and had finally arrived here.

That was some unbelievable tough work.

All that took him four hours.

With lots of patience, he had to ambush one or two people at a time and knocked them out in succession, taking him a total of four hours.

He had infiltrated this place at eleven, and now, it's already three in the morning.

"Ah ~ darn, I'm really tired."

Ryner said wearily.

Well, by the time he reached the fifth floor, it had gradually become more troublesome, and how he cleared the fifth and sixth floor was just like what he did a while ago.

To put it in another way, if he had continued to clear the fifth and sixth floor in the same slow manner, it would probably take until morning.

But now, he could finally move around freely.

Now that everyone had been knocked out, he was free to search around the facility as much as he wished.

Ryner had been looking forward to this outcome.

"..... uwah ~, what I have to do from hereon out might even be more troublesome however....."

Well, now that it's late into the night, there wasn't really any time for him to celebrate.

He gathered what little energy he had left, and trudged into one of the rooms on the sixth floor.

Before him lay a mountain of documents. He reached out to take some, and with familiar ease, started flipping through the pages with an incredible speed.

"..... oops, seems like this is the fruit of the idiotic work that the idiotic Sion was making me do every single day....."

At that moment, he started thinking of Sion again.

He remembered how he was made to slog throughout the past year,

"..... the next time I see him, I'll hit him first. *Do you know how much I want to hit you?*, that's what I will say to him....."

While muttering to himself, he continued flipping through the pages.

But it seemed like this room did not have anything he was looking for, and he headed to the neighbouring room.

And he repeated what he did.

After finishing, he went again to the next room.

"....."

By the way, before coming here, he had already acquired much of the information he desired.

For the whole of today, he was practically jumping from place to place within Roland.

In the morning, while making small talk with the people in town,

he was discovered by his pursuers and he fled, at noon, he assaulted some nobles' residence, extracted some information on how Roland would be moving from now on, and on top of that made off with their money, and then he was attacked by some of his pursuers who he crushed easily, went into hiding after all that, then after when things cooled down he came out again to gather more information from bars, back-street alleys, and other places self-proclaimed to be rich in information.

And consequently, he had a much more complete grasp of the situation in Roland.

1. The more prominent nobles were politically purged, having cuffs put on their authority and power.

Well, this would definitely please the people. *It's all thanks to the Hero King Sion-sama*, they were saying. *Sion-sama is the ally of the powerless people*.

2. For the past year, in order to deal with all the issues, Roland had amassed substantial power. As a result, the neigbouring countries were viewing Roland as a rising threat. They were supposedly banding together to form a coalition to crush Roland, but before they could do that, Roland had already invaded Nelpha. As expected of the reliable Hero King.

This was also something that Ryner was well aware of. Ryner had contributed to some of this power that Roland had acquired during this past year. Well, though among all areas, the fact that the military had expanded the most was something he didn't know of, and now that he thought about it, Sion had never involved him much in that area.

That was something he couldn't really stomach, but thinking with regards to the circumstances, it was something really beyond his control.

3. Even though they were waging war, the people were able to become more prosperous in their lifestyle. If the country's territory continues to expand in this manner, wouldn't the people be able to

become more prosperous?

Ryner had been doubtful of that line of thought. He thought that it couldn't be possible that the people can continue to become more prosperous in times of war.

To build one's happiness on top of the deaths of others, how can one possibly live with that?

Sion should have been one of the people who was well aware of this, and in the first place, even now Ryner was still doubtful about the necessity of strengthening Roland's military.

Indeed, in Northern Menoris exists the threat of Gastark Empire, armed with the Heroes' Relics, has started moving southwards and with its overwhelming power conquered the major power of Stohl.

And fearing that power, the three major powers in Central Menoris have started strengthening their military. Everyone has started setting their sights on war. Setting their sights on encroaching the territory of others.

The possibility of such a large scale world war happening right now is one that will set a precedence in history.

But even so, that is a matter still far up in the north. Until then, can't Sion, rather than using military force to wage wars to subjugate the south, instead resort to talks and diplomacy to bring the other countries together?

Well, normally that would not be possible.

It would not be possible for someone else other than that stupid king.

However, Ryner thought that Sion is one who possesses such an ability.

Without fighting, he would have the ability to stand in opposition to Gastark or other great nations. And furthermore there was still time.

But yet Sion.....

"What's causing you to be so impatient.....?"

Ryner was turning over the pages.

That's right.

Sion was being impatient.

Extremely impatient.

Impatiently moving forward.

Merely doing it all by himself. Without consulting with his best friend, taking on every single burden.

But why's that so?

Why was there a need to invade an ally now?

The massacre this time was a performance to make other countries submit easily.

Sion not only wanted to conquer Nelpha, but also Runa, Cassla, in fact the whole of Southern Menoris. Well, it's a possibility that his ambition extends to that of Central and Northern Menoris as well.

But what's the purpose of all that?

Is it for his own self satisfaction?

After acquiring one thing, he wants to get his hands on something better the next time. Something bigger and much better.

"..... what a fool he is....."

He is not such a person.

Ryner would be the one who is most aware of that.

The first time we met, he was like a weak insect. Very much afraid of hurting others. Very much afraid of hurting his comrades. And he would take on whatever had happened as his own fault.

That's why he wanted to become a king.

In order to protect people, his comrades, and the commoners.

He definitely did not become king to fulfill his own desires.

During that time.

At the battlefield where the both of them first met.

During that time, both Sion and Ryner were still students.

The battlefield where their comrades were being slaughtered, where Kiefer betrayed Roland, where Ryner went berserk from his **Alpha Stigma**, he remembered what Sion said then.

This is what he said. Even when he had done nothing wrong, with a sad face, with a self-reproaching face, this is what he said.

"..... it was my fault to have made you my teammate. Tyle, Toni, and Fahl..... it was also my fault that they died. The war that was started..... it's also because of me not having become king yet....."

He is a person who hates wars.

He hates having lives thrown away unnecessarily.

But still, now, he's impatiently killing off people.

What's the reason behind that?

"Why are you..... why in the world is Sion in such a hurry?"

At that moment.

"..... what a coincidence. That is what I'm looking into as well."

A voice was heard suddenly.

That was also from the room that Ryner was in.

Feeling surprised, Ryner looked up.

In complete darkness.

Inside the room which he thought was empty just a while ago. He could see the figure of a man, with his back facing him, sitting on a desk beside the window, with a stack of documents in his hands.

A desk which he could reach in merely five large strides. That was how close it was but yet, Ryner did not notice his presence all this while.

It was an extreme situation.

“……”

An extremely bad situation.

It meant that this guy was a guy of incredible power.

Without Ryner noticing, he had sneaked into the room.

No, wait a minute, could it be that he was here right from the beginning?

Ryner glared at the back of that man and said.

“…… so you have been here all this while?”

“Yeah.”

The man replied simply.

That voice was one familiar to Ryner, which troubled him.

He knew this man.

He looked intently at the back of the man.

Despite his youth, he had long white hair. And that mature, kind-looking face, and intelligent sounding voice.

Just by these features, he already knew who he was.

“…… Luke?”

As Ryner said that, the man turned around.

With a grinning, calm face. He was slightly taller than Ryner, and wore a Roland military uniform over his slender body.

Even though he looked like twenty-four, or twenty-five years of age, he sprouted complete white hair which is a special trait of his.

Just as he thought.

It was Luke Stokkart.

The subordinate of Milk Callaud, Ryner’s childhood friend.

Even though he was always carrying that frivolous smile, with the face of a teacher at a nursery school or a kindergarden, for him to

go unnoticed in this small, cramped room, he was someone whom Ryner could not take lightly.

Ryner's body tensed up in preparation of an engagement, and said.

"So, you are here, looking into something as well?"

Luke smiled.

"No way. I'm here waiting for you actually."

"..... how did you know I would be....."

"Haha. That's an easy one. With your current strength, there is no way you could have gone to the castle to question Sion-san directly. Well, it might be possible for you to overcome Class One Intelligence Center, but if you were going to escape to another country thereafter, it is necessary for you to avoid running the risk of getting injured. That's why you won't attempt to infiltrate that place. Well, you could always acquire that level of information later after escaping to Nelpha..... but in order to do that, you would need to first look into the real situation between Roland and Nelpha, that's why you've decided to come here to take a look before leaving this country..... and as you were wondering where those relevant documents are as you sift through the place....."

At that moment, Luke held out to show him the documents he was holding onto.

"And, here are those documents that I've consolidated for you....."

He smiled gently as he said that.

Ryner scowled at that smiling face.

"In other words, you knew all along that I was going to come here?"

"Well, that's right."

"..... and you're here to kill me?"

"Regarding that, well, I'm wondering about it."

Ryner gave the befuddled-looking Luke a sharp look and said.

"But at the very least, you have filled this room with the traps that

you take pride in, haven't you?"

And he looked around.

That's how it was. *The most troublesome thing about this guy is his extraordinary skill in laying traps.*

His strength didn't lie in his magic, his movements, nor his combat prowess. Well, even though he is notches above that of a normal soldier in all these areas, he was no match for Ryner.

Even though Ryner should have been more than a match for him, he did not feel that victory was already in his grasp.

He had the sinking feeling that all his moves would be read by this guy if he were to fight him.

Feels like I'm dancing in the palms of this fella.

Within Ryner's sight, he could not see the signs of any traps in the room.

But Luke laughed,

"Ever since you were fighting on the first floor, I have been doing my best, spending two hours to lay all my traps."

He said that promptly.

As he thought, there were traps present. And it was beyond Ryner's ability to find them.

A fatal mistake. It was almost as if his defeat had been decided.

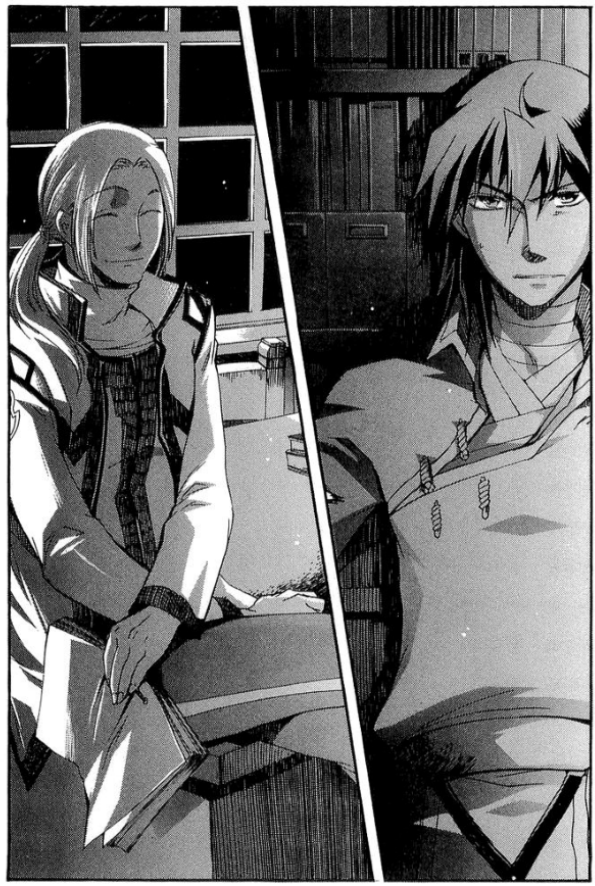
"....."

Wait, what if this was all a bluff, another specialty of his. Which meant that there was no real physical trap, but the trap was in his words themselves, that is, a bluff to stop Ryner from moving?

Ryner shifted his eyes around, desperately searching for the presence of any traps in the dark room.

As he did that, Luke pointed to a spot near him,

"For example, somewhere to your right, a trap that springs out a knife."



Instantly.

A ‘ba-ching’ sound was heard behind him.

Ryner, in a flash, looked there.

That was a fatal move.

The sound was made by a rubber band, which Luke had sprung, striking a document shelf.

And Ryner appeared to be distracted by it.

The opening was all that Luke needed to make his move. A knife

streaked through the air in a straight line towards his head……

But a smile floated on Ryner's face,

"I thought something like this would happen."

He took a step backwards and dodged it.

Luke had a surprised look on his face.

"Ah, you dodged it."

"Ha. That's because of the many times I've suffered from falling into your traps……"

But that was not the end yet.

This time round, Luke pointed to his left and said.

"Ah, but the trap is there instead."

"You can't fool me again……"

At that moment, a 'go-gan' sound rang out on his left.

"Go-gan!?"

Without thinking, Ryner shouted. It was evident that the sound was not made by a rubber band.

So what was that?

Well, if I turned my head, this time round, I'll really have Luke's knife sticking into me.

Now, now, then again, it just won't do if I don't know where that 'go-gan' sound came from. Because it's 'go-gan' right? It's not 'ba-ching' hello? The 'go-gan' sound seemed to be something I can't take lightly……

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhh this is so shitty!"

That tug-of-war struggle inside his mind took place in only an instant, and in the end, unable to bear it anymore, Ryner turned his eyes toward that sound.

As he did that, what he saw was a teddy bear being launched from inside of a bookshelf, falling onto the ground.

And then.

“……”

And then that was it.

“Huh, what was that all about!”

Ryner yelled, and Luke smiled.

“What do you think? Does it suit your taste?”

“What!?”

“Well, I was referring to the teddy bear of course. Cute, isn’t it?”

“It’s not cute at alllll!”

“Eh, is that so? Well, I bought that as a souvenir for Captain Milk…… after hearing that it was the cutest and how popular it was from the shop assistant at the plushie store……”

“Duh, that’s not the pointttttttttt! Arghhhhhhhhh, so now, what the heck are you after all this while!”

For some reason, Luke did not intend to seriously fight Ryner today.

Nevertheless, with a weary face from dealing with Luke’s bluffs and trickery, he said.

“…… whenever I fight with you, it’s a serious drain on both my heart and mind, and I really hate that.”

“That goes the same for me, you know. You practically surpass in me in every area, and if I made a mistake in my tactics, I’ll be dead. But then again, I don’t make mistakes.”

“Your face certainly doesn’t go well with your dislikable personality.”

“Haha. Because the only person whom I’ll be gentle to is Captain Milk.”

“Oh really, is that so?”

“Yup, that’s right.”

Looking intently at the contented expression of Luke, Ryner let out a sigh.

It's really tiring to talk to this guy, he thought. When he looked at the all-knowing face that seemed to be able to see through anything and everything, he felt that whatever his reaction or response was, it would make him look like a fool.

Ryner looked up and looked at Luke.

"So, what business do you have with me? You are here to meet me right?"

Luke acknowledged.

"..... yes, that's right. I've come here to meet you, the traitor Ryner Lute-san."

"Woah. So now I've become a traitor of this country?"

"Yup."

"Even though I did nothing traitorous at all?"

Luke shrugged at his query.

"..... you are a traitor if you are judged to be so, regardless of whether you truly are one or not..... it's something you hear often in this country, isn't it so?"

And Ryner averted his eyes from Luke and looked at the teddy bear on the ground.

That was supposed to be Milk's souvenir.

Milk.

Milk Callaud.

A comrade and a childhood friend, like Ryner, she was raised in a terrible place where human experiments were conducted day in and day out, a place where nothing but torturous training awaited them daily --- 307 Special Facility.

The Roland then was truly terrible. Rather, until recently when Sion ascended the throne, it was a truly terrible country, a world where, a village could be wiped out just on the capriciousness of a noble,

let alone being branded a traitor falsefully.

But that was no longer the case.

Ryner looked up again and said.

“Indeed, that used to be the case..... But no longer now, since Sion became king.”

Luke nodded.

“Yes. This country has changed. It has taken a large step forward. And in days to come, it will continue moving forward.”

That’s right. This country is moving forward. It will continue moving forward. But that,

“..... towards where? Where is it heading to?”

Luke smiled.

“Towards..... the light.”

“But, what if that is the wrong light?”

“The Hero King will never be wrong.”

“Is that so? Sion can be unexpectedly a dunce sometimes. The other day, when he was working an all-nighter, the sleepy-head ended up at the wrong place while going to the toilet.”

“Ahahaha. Is that for real?”

Of course it’s for real.

And it was just sometime ago. About a month ago. At a time when the landscape of this country had not yet changed.

But now, in just one month, everything had been completely transformed.

But why was that so?

“..... what in the world is Sion trying to accomplish? Is there something he is trying to get his hands on that there is a need to attain such power? Why is he in such a hurry to move northwards?”

There must be a reason. There must be an answer to all those questions.

Whether it was about the world war, or Gastark, or the unrest in the neighbouring countries, et cetera, there must be a reason behind all these.

But yet, why was Sion, who hated bloodshed and would never want to see his comrades die, a person who would be pained even at the death of his enemies, why was he doing this,

“Even if there is a reason..... isn’t he in too much of a hurry?”

At Ryner’s query, Luke looked doubtful.

“That’s why I’m looking into that.”

“..... even you guys don’t get what is going on?”

“Not really, we understand more or less what is currently transpiring. But still, there are a few things we are concerned with. His Majesty has been keeping secrets from us. Well then again, ever since I knew him, Sion-san has always liked to keep things to himself. It’s something that can’t be helped.....”

Ryner thought about that.

Luke mentioned --- secrets.

It could be that, he thought.

During that rainy night.

There was something inside Sion, and during that time, his appearance had transformed into something strange.

That must be something that was influencing Sion’s actions. Rather, even for his imprisonment, as well as his fretful actions, there must be a relationship between those and the form he took back then, Ryner thought.

But what the hell was that?

Of course, he wasn’t about to look into all that within this country.

But could Luke have already,

“Are you already on to something?”

“Nope.”

Luke promptly shook his head.

“But, currently, my superior..... ahh speaking of that, it’s someone Ryner-san is acquainted with as well. Rahel Miller, having being summoned by Sion-san, is currently being updated on a number of matters.”

“Ah, I see. So Sion is letting him in on the secrets?”

“No idea. It’s not as if I was the one summoned. But still, it doesn’t really matter. Those are Sion-san’s business. There must be a good reason behind them.”

He spoke in a trusting tone.

Because he’s the Hero King, he will definitely not make a mistake.

That’s the tone he used.

Ryner said.

“As I said, what if Sion made a mistake?”

But Luke shook his head.

“Didn’t I tell you earlier? The Hero King will never make a mistake.”

“Didn’t I also tell you? He is unexpectedly a dunce at times. He has made mistakes before.”

“He makes no mistakes.”

“He does. The thing is..... he might have been deceived by somebody else altogether.”

Like the thing inside of him.

Or perhaps that somebody could have been the monster who appears and disappears every now and then around him --- Lucile.

He sighed at that thought. That’s right. There was the possibility that Sion had been deceived and someone was making use of him.

As to exactly who it was..... or what it was, he didn't know, but it could be due to some sort of embroilment with some particular legend, a legend surrounded by Heroes' Relics, God, Demon, and things like that. There was a possibility that he was used.

Keeping all this to himself, Ryner looked intently at Luke and continued.

"..... you know, he isn't the kind of person you guys think he is. He is very much a clumsy fella who would try to bear every burden all by himself. He will never make a mistake? Just because he's the Hero King? Don't say such a stupid thing. He is a fella who frequently makes mistakes, and then he'll be regretting it, brooding over it, continuing to put all the blame on himself. Even if he is the Hero King, he is still human. There is no way he won't make a mis....."

At that moment,

Luke cut in and said.

"I'm very well aware of that."

"Huh?"

"Like I said, I'm very much well aware of that. Even Sion-san does make mistakes..... we do acknowledge that. But despite that, what I meant was, that it doesn't matter. Even for the summons this time, where Miller-senpai has gone to hear Sion-san out, it's not like we're going to completely believe Sion-san's words. Well....."

Luke stopped mid-sentence, and moved away from Ryner. And once again, he propped himself up onto the desk.

"..... right from the beginning, we have not believed in everything. Regarding this country, or even the Hero King....."

Ryner frowned at Luke's words.

"So why are you guys working for him?"

At that, Luke shrugged his shoulders as if to say it's a no-brainer.

"Isn't it because Sion-san is an excellent king? Anybody could see that it's no easy task to find a person of such calibre. To be blessed with such an excellent king, it's the great fortune of Roland."

“So……”

Luke interrupted, and continued.

“However, whether Sion-san is an excellent king or not, and whether we can trust Sion-san or not, are two different matters. It’s possible to work under him despite not trusting him. While we constantly question whether the young king is making any mistakes. If he did, it’s up to us to reduce the number of sacrifices along the way. The Hero King’s…… subordinates had the freedom to act. But for that to happen……”

At that moment, Luke held out the documents in his hand.

“We must have accurate information. And it’s not something that is acquired one-sided through only his words. It’s not something that we get from only one source in hindsight. It must be something that is attained from every possible location, a macroscopic way of gathering information……”

At that point, unexpectedly, Luke had a embarrassed look,

“Oops, it seems like I’ve been preaching a lot to you? But, since you are about to embark on a journey…… this is something I feel a young man like you should hear…… that’s why I’ve come here specially to talk to you.”

He said.

Ryner gave him a sharp look.

So, this is how things were. This fella doesn’t believe in anything.

People.

Country.

The world.

And not to mention even for Sion, he’s a person to be doubted.

That’s why they were allowing Ryner to escape.

To get outside of this country.

In order to let him gather information from other countries.

Those were not the only thoughts that Ryner had had while conversing with Luke just now.

“Even if it’s Sion, could it be that he had been deceived and manipulated into doing all that?”

Even this particular train of thought, quite possibly, was something that this fella had led me to, he thought.

He is constantly suspicious of everything in this world.

“..... so what is it that you are trying to make me accomplish?”

Ryner groaned and Luke, once again, shrugged with a befuddled look.

“Nothing. We just want you to live in whichever way you want.”

“Don’t mess with me.”

“I’m not. In truth..... we have some hopes on you..... if Sion-san comes to make a huge, irreversible mistake, we are hoping you can become a force of deterrence. In order to save Sion-san, you are heading out to the world to obtain the necessary power. Excellent. That’s absolutely excellent. Even though we don’t know what is going to happen to you..... if you manage to obtain great power..... such as an army, or a country, a power that is on par with Roland, if at that point in time you still see yourself as Sion-san’s friend..... since a reassuring partner is hard to come by during a time of a great war plaguing the entire continent, isn’t it so?”

Even as Luke asked that, he continued.

“If Sion-san becomes mad and turns into a tyrant, we’ll need someone who can kill him..... well then again, when that happens, or rather before that happens, we will kill him ourselves.”

He said it in such a manner as if they could do that anytime.

But Luke shook his head. Even though Ryner had not said anything, it was if Luke could read his mind and he smiled,

“No, that’s not it. If we lay our hands on Sion-san at this stage, the ones getting killed will be us. Currently, we don’t have any way of dealing with the monster Lucile. Well, then again..... we’ll manage somehow.”

What a thing to say.

It was as if.

The manner in which he talked, it was as if he could really see through everything.

"..... the monster, would be you instead."

Ryner said with a half-groan.

And Luke smiled again.

"Haha. I was often told that when I was a child. But, aren't you the same as well?"

"....."

"Well, that's enough I guess. I'll drop it and various other things among that. I've probably talked too much. Then, please have this."

As he said that, he handed the documents to him.

"These are the documents that will fill you in on the situation between Roland and Nelpha. To be honest, I was lying when I told you I consolidated these, they were from my subordinate, Lear Rinkal, who worked through the night before to assemble all these. It's all for your sake. He's an excellent man, and it should be easy to read."

Ryner took the documents from him.

The cover page read,

"Report for Ryner-kun who's about to embark on a journey".

That was the title.

"..... sigh. You guys are making fun of me."

Luke shook his head furiously.

"We are not making fun of you at all. Rather, we are pretty much fearful of you. We were pretty troubled on whether or not to let a person of such power out of the country. But we decided to let you go..... do you know the reason?"

Of course, I do.

"..... the threat that Sion posed is greater than myself, isn't it? If in the event Sion goes crazy and comes after me, I will be the one to kill him. I'm an insurance against Sion running amok."

But, Luke shook his head again.

"It's the reverse, complete reverse. We let you go in order to leave open the possibility of not having Sion-san killed. If assuming that Sion-san was deceived and manipulated by others, and eventually makes a terrible mistake, what we can only do is to kill him. But it's different for you right? You will hang on till the end. No matter how many sacrifices, how much hurt you've incurred, you will still hang on, and try to bring Sion-san back. Because you are his friend..... because you're his best friend, like what you did on that rainy night..... you still hung on....."

Ryner was left alone in the room.

In his hands were the documents detailing the war status between Roland and Nelpha, which was what Ryner had been looking for.

He flipped the pages and started reading the contents.

So after reading this, what is Luke telling me to do?

He thought for an instant, then shook his head.

No.

It should be after reading this, "what will I do" instead.

That would be something which Luke could not predict, which Sion could not predict.

What in the world can I actually accomplish?

For his sake.

No, that's not all.

For the sake of the world.

What is it that I can do for the sake of this world?

He recalled the words spoken by a youth, a cursed eye bearer, just

before he died a while ago, before Ryner's eyes.

They were the words of the youth named Lafra.

"Those who have given up on humans, sorrowful God's eyes bearers..... please save them."

After saying that, he died.

But just before he died, he was smiling. He was smiling with a saddened face. It was the same as the former Ryner. It was a resigned smile that held unspeakable resentment and sorrow for being born with those cursed eyes.

It was then when Lafra said to Ryner.

"It's because you are a kind and gentle person."

He spoke of a foolish thing.

"That's why..... you will definitely keep the promise. I'm happy to have met you in the end."

Even though he was not really that kind and gentle.

Even though there was no way he could keep that promise.

Lafra still said that.

And then he died.

Ryner thought of trying to keep that promise.

For a person like him who had given up on everything, for once, he would like to try keeping that promise.

In order to do that, he tried working hard, trying to change Roland.

But in the end, this happened.

He couldn't protect anyone.

With only a mild effort, he couldn't save anyone.

Lafra, Pueka, Tiir, Kiefer, Milk, Ferris, Tyle, Toni, Fahl, Arua, Sion.....

And above all else, he couldn't save himself.

That had to be because his amount of commitment was not enough.

Since he thought by relying on Sion, with just some amount of effort, everything would work out fine.

To treasure himself more.

To hurt himself more.

To strengthen himself more.

There was a need to take on more responsibility unto himself.

Not the fault of anyone.

Not for the sake of anyone.

What did he actually want to achieve? What did he want to do? It was necessary to think about all this.

“I want to save Sion.”

But that was not all.

“..... people..... everything that’s before me..... I want to save everyone.”

But that was not all.

“Humans, cursed eyes bearers, adults, children, men, women, countries, the world..... anything and everything.....”

All of them.

He wanted to save all that he could see.

That was what Ryner thought.

“.....”

But that was dream talk.

There was probably somebody else who would say the same.

To bring happiness to others.

To prevent others from getting hurt.

Such kind of dream talk.

Of course, Ryner also thought of this as merely dream talk.

He himself had also caused hurt to others before.

Rather, there were already many who had been hurt by him.

But still.

But still, he decided to choose a different path from Sion.

Until now, he had been running away, and because of that, it had always led to him losing various things.

But this time around, he wanted to try moving forward without running away.

No matter what he has to lose.

No matter what kind of sadness he has to go through.

He wanted to try believing in himself.

Believing in the him who wanted to save someone.

Believing in the him who wanted to save Sion, the him who wanted to save the world.

This monster. For the sake of the people who believed in this monster which was capable of hurting someone just by being alive.

He wanted to try believing in himself a little more.

“.....”

At that moment, as he was flipping through the documents that Luke left him, an article he remembered flashed into his mind.

That was something from before Sion ascended the throne.

It was a report that he written during the two years in which, in place of Kiefer, he had spent in prison. It was a report which he had forgotten a long time ago.

The report began like this.

People hate dying.

They hate killing as well.

They don't like making others cry, or cry themselves.

How would it feel to not be able to choose one's own life?

What about having one's family dead?

What about having one's lover dead?

No one should have wished for all that, but yet why is the world smiling and desiring only such senseless sorrow?

I have never thought of forcefully changing anything. But if I don't, it will be sorrowful, and neither do I want to lose any more things……

Such bothersome talk……

It's about time to move on. All this while, I've averted my eyes, but if needed, I shall try looking at my own past.

And.

In order to create a world where no one loses anything.

A world in which that child, and Kiefer don't have to cry, in which Tyle, Toni, and Fahl don't have to die, in which Sion doesn't have to brood.

A world in which everyone can laugh and just take afternoon naps.

Ryner Lute

"…… but, I didn't do anything."

He thought.

He did not do a single thing.

That's why this was the worst kind of report.

Lafra and Pueka were dead, and Sion was brooding alone, crying.

Before it came to all that, I didn't do anything.

But, it's different now.

He would not say that it was too late, but instead work harder.

In order not to continue losing anything that was precious to him.

In order not to make his dear friends, comrades, family, and people precious to him cry anymore.

He stood up.

"..... I shall leave this country."

There were a lot of things that had to be done.

Rather.

There were a lot of things that he wanted to do.

That's why he wanted to leave this country and become stronger, Ryner thought.

Suddenly, at that moment,

"Ah, I see I see."

Luke, who had supposedly left the room, was peeping in,

"Huuuuuuhhhhhhhhh!? Eh? What? I thought you've left already!"

Luke said with an apologetic look,

"No, I'm sorry. I wanted to continue observing you for a while....."

"Don't fool around with meeee

“Well, I never thought Ryner-san is such a fiery and passionate person……”

“Shut uuupppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppp!”

“Well well, I’m praising you and there’s no need to feel shy about it……”

“Please I beg you, stop that pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeease!”

“Is it really that embarrassing?”

“…… eh? Of course it is……”

“Then, I shall stop.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

Ryner felt a sense of relief. Moreover, it was great that the person who had heard him was not that bully Sion, nor that willful Ferris, but this man with a gentle disposition, he thought……

But, at that moment.

“Well but, *but, I didn’t do anything*……, that line moved even me……”

“As I thought, you are a detestable guyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!”

Ryner looked like he was about to cry.

After laughing delightfully at that, Luke said,

“Let’s get to the main topic.”

“Main topic?”

“Yes. There was something I forgot to tell you.”

“What?”

“Ryner-san intends to break into Nelpha through the Senel border gate right?”

While Ryner did not make any acknowledgement, he had indeed thought of that route.

The Senel border was narrow and was practically unusable for large armies to move through, and most important of all, the Roland troops that were currently invading Nelpha would not be present there.

However.

Luke said.

“There’s an ambush there.”

That was something he expected of course.

“..... is that at the level that even Ferris and I can’t break through?”

Luke tilted his head.

“Well, maybe? But I think it’s gonna be tough. If I were you, I won’t choose that route.”

“So it can’t be done?”

“It can’t be done.”

“..... geez, it’s such a bother. Then which way should I opt for hm?”

Ryner spread an imaginary map in his head.

There were two other paths aside from Senel, but one of them, was probably currently used by Roland to send troops into Nelpha, a pretty troublesome route.

That meant only one choice was left.

Luke spoke before him.

“By the way, Fait as well.”

“Ambush?”

“Yes.”

“Sion is serious eh?”

“Well, I’m not so sure whether it’s under the orders of His Majesty.”

“Then, whose orders is it?”

“Who knows? I haven’t really investigated who has currently undertaken the mission of pursuing you……”

Ryner, with a disgruntled look, said,

“Do your job properly duh.”

“Haha. I’m not really obligated to do so much for you.”

Luke laughed.

“But, if you can’t even overcome an obstacle of this level……”

He stopped before finishing, but Ryner knew what he wanted to say.

If he could not even overcome an obstacle of this level, he was no longer of any value to Luke.

Ryner thought.

From now on, he would be pursued by the Hero King of Roland Empire, a major power of southern Menoris.

If he couldn’t even overcome something of this level.

“……”

Ryner started weighing his situation.

Well, even if he didn’t use a border gate, he could always choose to use a wilderness path to go over a mountain to enter Nelpha territory.

That would be pretty bothersome though.

It would take him several days more if he took that alternative, compared to using a border gate.

During that time, the pursuit would still continue, and as much as possible, he would like to be in Nelpha sooner.

“Well, whichever the case, regarding the matter of whether or not we can break through a border gate, I will have to verify it with my own eyes before……”

Ryner looked up.

“Duh, there’s no one around!”

Not knowing when Luke left, he uttered without thinking.

Once again, Ryner was left alone in the dark room.

But he wasn’t about to believe that.

He had enough of having his embarrassing talk eavesdropped by someone else like what had happened earlier.

He started up to ascertain whether Luke had really left.

He opened the door and looked down the corridor.

But it seemed like Luke was gone this time……

At that moment.

Along the corridor.

From the direction which should be leading to a stairway, Luke’s head popped out,

“There’s no need to see me off, you know?”

“As I thought, you’re still here!”

“Fufufu. Since you are way too trusting of people at times, I thought I shall have you be a little bit more suspicious…… now, can you tell whether I really intend to go back or～?”

With all his heart, Ryner answered the quiz that Luke, who appeared to be having fun, had put forth.

“The hell I care, moron! Go die already! Go die now!”

“Ah haha. You are so cruel. But, I’m really going back now. It’s pointless to stop me……”

“……”

Without waiting for him to finish what he was saying, Ryner walked back into the room and shut the door.

Once he did that, he could no longer hear Luke’s voice.

This time round, he heard the sound of Luke’s footsteps walking

down the stairs, but whether that was really the case or just a sham, was something Ryner didn't know, however, he thought that it didn't really matter anymore, and after letting out a sigh, he took a chair and sat down.

Behaving like a punk, he brought his legs up onto the desk.

When he looked at the clock hanging on the wall of the room, it was already four o'clock in the night.

"No, it should be morning instead....."

With the current season, the sun wasn't up at such an early hour, and the sky was still dark.

But it won't be long before daybreak.

When morning comes, they have to start their journey out of the country.

He told Ferris to wait at Asohld dango tea-house, which was just a little further north of the street from this place, at eight in the morning.

Four hours from now.

No, taking into account the time needed to reach that place, Ryner only had an hour left to gather information from within Roland.

One more hour.

He looked outside the window. And gazed out into the night.

From the window which was facing to the west, it was just the right place for him to see the castle sitting in the northwest. He looked at the streets just below the castle to the southwest.

He was gazing at the country that had raised him.

The visible scenery.

He gazed at the nauseating, visible scenery.

And incidentally, he thought

After leaving the country today, I won't be back for quite a while.

No, it's possible that I won't be coming back at all.

The place where Milk, Kiefer, Sion, Ferris, and his friends and comrades were, it was possible that he won't be coming back at all, he thought.

It was different from before.

It was different from the time when he and Ferris, under the orders of Sion, left to search for the Heroes' Relics in various countries.

Today, for Ryner, it was farewell to this country.

Though it was not because he felt any saddness in that, for some reason, he had those thoughts.

This place where he was born, where he was bullied, where he was tortured, where he was scorned, where he was treated as a taboo, this kind of country could just disappear for all he cared, but before he knew it, he had found friends and comrades.

But, all that was soon to be destroyed, and in order to restore things, he was going to embark on a journey.

A journey to save his dearest friend.

That was something awesome, he thought.

For someone who had nothing up until now, it was like his life was lit by a radiant light.

He felt that finally there was a meaning to his life.

But, still.

"....."

Ryner looked outside the window with a faint, sad smile.

"..... but still, it feels a little sad to be leaving this place, I guess."

A lot happened here after all.

Even though most of them might be unpleasant, but it did feel like there were also many good things that happened which could displace all that.

He had never thought that he would ever experience such days. On many occasions, he thought he was going to die and that tomorrow would never come.

It was different now.

It felt sad he could not return to those good old days. He thought of how nice it would be if those happy days could continue. Why was it always the case, that only when precious things were lost, then would he realize it, and feel regretful about it.

If he had to lose them anyway, he would have indulged in them more during those days. During those days, he would have done more.

I would have laughed more, and make others laugh more. I really like you guys. Since I was saved by you guys, I wanted to save you guys as well, even if it's embarrassing, I would tell you guys these if time could turn back. If I knew we couldn't go back to the way it was, I would have told you guys properly……

He was thinking of something stupid.

Nevertheless, he could no longer go back to those days.

No matter how much he regretted it, he could not turn time back.

But wouldn't it be alright if he could change things again tomorrow, he asked himself.

Whenever he thought about the past good times he had, it felt indeed a little.

A little sad.

And he was certain that.

"…… you feel the same way, don't you? Sion."

Ryner said as if he was conversing with someone.

But there was no answer.

He gazed through the window. The tall castle, for some reason gave off a different feeling from before, feeling colder, more inhuman, and further away.

Awfully far.

It might be a little difficult to reach the castle with his outstretched arms currently.[11] Stretching higher and taller, it probably won't do if he didn't give his best.

But, but still.

"....."

At that moment, Ryner averted his eyes from the window.

And looked at those documents received from Luke, which were propped on his lap. And turned the pages.

He wanted to use the remaining hour to go through the documents. One way or another, it would be difficult to make his move without confirming the situation in Nelpha.

Since he was still debating on whether to continue on to Nelpha, or to head towards Runa instead.

He flipped the pages. And the next page, the next page, the next page.

With an incredible speed, he scanned the words and input the information into his head.

The situation was worse than he thought.

The women and children were really being massacred.

Even though he knew the reason behind it, but still, Ryner frowned.

And then, Nelpha's actions became weird. Just right before Nelpha's king officially expressed his surrender, he was killed and confusion set in.

On top of that, the successor sent ten thousand troops to square off with Roland, while he promptly escaped in the meantime.

That was why currently, without the presence of the king, there was no one in authority who could raise the surrender flag for Nelpha.

In this situation, Roland would have to continue fighting until Nelpha was completely destroyed.

But at that point, a ray of hope appeared.....

“..... huh? What’s this.....”

At that moment.

He said with a slight groan.

“.....that rascal Luke.....”

Finally, Ryner understood what Luke was trying to make him do.

It was the worst.

Luke was making him do something which could be said to be the worst kind of bother that could ever be.

This was what was in the documents.

Although the stupid prince, who killed Nelpha’s king and made his escape thereafter, had sent ten thousand troops to fight Roland, in the end, they did not meet Roland’s army at all.

A new commander had appeared and taken command of the ten thousand troops.

A person who carried the blood of the dead king.

The son of the stupid prince and his commoner mistress, a capable man who was popular among the people, had successfully persuaded the ten thousand soldiers to come under his lead, and had led them west, avoiding the conflict with Roland.

And the name of the man who had saved those ten thousand soldiers was.

“..... Toale.....”

Ryner said with a weary voice.

Toale Nelphi.

He knew that name well. Just about a year ago, when Sion made a diplomatic visit to Nelpha’s capital, Ryner was also there as well and that was when he had met him. Despite his frailness, he tried to protect his little brother and sister from some stray hoodlums, and as he was getting beaten up, that was when Ryner and Ferris came

to his rescue, and that was how they met one another.

That was the discriminated son of the stupid prince and his commoner mistress, but then again, being part of royalty still, he had some amount of influence and had helped Ryner in looking up various things in the library..... well, to say that he knew him well, that was actually the extent of it.

However, he had also put them up and had spent a number of days with the duo.

Toale himself, as well as with his numerous brothers and sisters.

Indeed, he looked like a promising youth with a good head, and always did whatever he could to protect his brothers and sisters while going about his own life.

He was also popular among the people in town, and they cried for him to be the next king rather than that stupid prince.

That fella is really a popular guy.

Thanks to that popularity, he attracted the attention of a strange 'monster'.

At that moment, Ryner remembered the incident in which a powerful, black 'demon' had come to kill Toale.

"..... Miran Froaude."

Speaking of this, that was the first time he met that man.

With a wave of his ring, he could summon shadow beasts to attack them.

That ring was probably a Hero's Relic, and on top of that, though Ryner recognized him to be a descendent of the Holy Knight Halford Miran, that man, evidently filled with darkness, hardly looked like a descendent of the Holy Knight.

What he could only see was a demon to the core.

One who could kill people without a change in expression.

And he came to kill Toale.

It seemed like he was working for a tyrant king, and was willing to

kill anyone who might hinder them.

“That fella is seriously some kind of murderous devil……”

Ryner said with a groan as he recalled all this.

He remembered his words.

From some place within the dark and deep recesses of his mind, he remembered his words.

“You were asking me, what would be left after killing off all the hindrances…… that was what you asked right? From the bottom of my heart, I would say that after killing off all the hindrances, what’s left would be those of convenience who could serve my purpose. From the perspective of an ***Alpha Stigma*** *bearer like you, if you kill off all the other human beings, then the world will be easier to live in for all the* ***Alpha Stigma*** *bearers…… That is the truth, isn’t it? People are animals who could only live an existence of aggression. In order to eat, in order to protect their pride, in order to have a better life, in order to protect a loved one……”*

And, in order not to be killed……

People fight.

To create a place where there are no sacrifices, where everyone can live happily…… that is a pile of bullshit. This kind of world is impossible. The world is not as naive a place as you think.

That was what he said.

People fight in order not to be killed.

That was perhaps a statement striking true. But even so, it doesn’t mean he would accept that.

People can find someone to be of a hindrance at one time, or to be disagreeable, or they may even want someone to disappear, but in the next instant, they can also love the same person whom they hated a while ago.

If that someone were to die unexpectedly, even though they should have found him or her to be a bother, they could become lonely in

the end, as a result.

That's why, undoubtedly, there was only one of the aforementioned reasons that fit the needs of having to kill off a hindrance.

If everyone were to kill one another, in the end, oneself will become a hindrance and have to be killed.

It was obvious that the path he was seeking was wrong.

And the result was already showing.

Indeed, as a military man from the great nation of Stohl up north, his words might seem fitting..... but Stohl should have already been annihilated by Gastark.

He wondered what had happened to him after all that, but well,

"I'm pretty sure no one would miss him, so let me just forget about him."

Ryner smiled and returned his former thoughts.

In any case, Toale, who was targetted by Froaude, is a capable man.

And finally, just as the people had wished, a opportunity had arisen for Toale to ascend the throne.

"But..... what bad timing it is."

Toale was probably born unlucky, Ryner thought.

With regards of Toale's situation, Ryner had no clue, but as to what Toale was thinking about, it was a different story.

Firstly,

"Since we're surrendering, would you forgive the ten thousand soldiers and the people?"

That would probably be his proposal. But this would be rejected.

Because Nelpha's king is still that stupid prince, and not you.

The Roland now would not just stop at this. In the future, it had plans to invade Runa, Cassla and other neighbouring countries.

They could not afford to show any mercy just because of Toale's proposal, in order to make Nelpha an example for the rest.

Roland is going to use its might to crush Nelpha thoroughly, and it's not up to you to stop them.

If you really want to put forth a surrender, you had to take the head of your stupid prince father. And become the official king of Nelpha, only then will anyone start listening to you.

But that was going to be something reckless.

Toale had only ten thousand troops under his command.

In comparison, the stupid prince had sixty-eight thousand soldiers protecting him.

That's nearly seven times.

It wasn't a battle Toale could win.

But still, he had no choice but to win. If he could not win over the hearts of the seventy thousand soldiers and have the stupid prince's head delivered to him, Nelpha's people would be doomed.

Therefore,

"..... so this is where I shall come in to help?"

With a bitter face, Ryner looked in the direction where Luke had left.

"..... that sly fox."

Given his capabilities in gathering intelligence, Luke must have been aware that Ryner was acquainted with Toale.

He probably predicted that Ryner would go give Toale a hand after reading these documents.

He remembered his earlier words.

"If you manage to obtain great power..... and so on and so forth."

"Such as an army..... and so on and so forth."

"A power that is on par with Roland..... and so on and so forth."

"If at that point in time you still see yourself as Sion-san's friend..... and so on and so forth."

He could only hear Luke telling him to go help Toale from all those words.

"Geez. He was out to use me right from the beginning."

Ryner said with a fed-up voice.

However, as things were going, he had to go help him. If he didn't, lots of people would die. That was something Ryner did not want.

No, even if Ryner didn't go help him, Roland would, through some secret maneuvers, dispatch some reinforcements to help Toale with killing that stupid prince.

That was the most advantageous method to Roland.

And once Toale had served his purpose.

Toale would be killed.

"....."

After executing the stupid prince, his capable son, and Nelpha's royalty, they would announce it to the neighbouring counties.

Did you see the fate of Nelpha, who dare oppose Roland?

If you want to surrender, now's the time.

If you do it now, we will spare the royal family and the nobles, and allow them to keep their status.

But, if you don't surrender now.....

"*We'll destroy you.....* to that effect?"

At that moment, Ryner flipped close the documents from Luke.

After withdrawing his legs from the desk, he folded his arms.

And he looked at the ceiling.

"..... I'm beat."

He grumbled.

For some reason, just as he was about to leave the country, the number of things he had to do just kept piling up.

In other words, if he didn't hurry, the homework would seem to continue accumulating.

If he tarried around any longer, Nelpha's soldiers and people would be killed off in the meantime.

A little more bothersome than that would be if Toale's head were to fly next.

But what should he do next after rescuing Toale?

After linking up with Toale and mobilizing his troops, he would somehow immobilize that stupid prince. It was clear up till that part.

But, what's next?

Taking Toale along and finding a way out somehow? Would Roland overlook that?

No, it might turn out that he would need to take command of Nelpha's troops and battle it out with Roland's army in order to protect Toale.....?

"....."

Ryner scowled at the ceiling while turning things over in his head.

Normally, that would not have been the case.

At the very least, Sion, the current Sion would not come to such a conclusion.

If all they needed was the single life of Toale, there was no necessity to incur unneeded loss of lives.

That was balance. A giant balance which human lives rode on.

Kill less to save more.

To save ten thousand lives, it's ok to kill a thousand.

That has to be what people call a king.

Carrying the fate of a country, the lives of many people while moving forward, that has to be what a king is.

But.

"But..... will I be capable of such a thing?"

Rather, is it okay to do such a thing?

He asked himself.

In order to protect the peace of many, and kill off all the cursed eye bearers.

In order to protect the peace of many, Sion had become a sacrifice while weeping.

Can I forgive all this?

"....."

He thought otherwise.

He thought that there had to be another way.

A world where no one loses anything.

A world where no one cries.

Could such a world exist?

Of course, if he were to say such a thing, he might be laughed at. No, in actual fact, Froaude had already laughed at him.

A country without any sacrifices where everyone living in it can laugh happily.

He laughed that off as bullshit. He told him that it's better to stop overlooking the painful experiences in reality and to stop dreaming of such naivety.....

At that thought, Ryner's face twisted in pain.

"I already have plenty of those painful experiences....."

But still, even if others were to give up on such a dream, I would still think that way.

If Sion was crying and giving up, I would still……

"……"

Even though he said that, it was still an unpleasant bother to square off with Roland's army.

At that thought, Ryner recalled the name of the commander of Roland's army in Nelpha from the documents Luke gave him.

The current commanding officer of Roland's army was Field Marshal Claugh Klom.

That red-hair muscle-brain.

But Ryner was well aware of that.

The first time when he met him, the only time when they exchanged blows, he became well aware of how bothersome his strength could pose.

Crimson Finger Claugh Klom.

That name was equivalent to that of a death god on a battlefield.

"…… a~h, am I supposed to fight that monster on the battlefield? Seriously?"

Ryner said in an unpleasant tone.

On top of that, this time round, he was not just putting his own life on the line.

He might be possibly shouldering the lives of both the soldiers of Roland under Claugh's command, as well as the troops of Nelpha under Toale's command.

Could he actually fight such an opponent while taking care to minimize the number of casualties at the same time?

"……"

At that thought, he recalled even more of what the documents contained. Luke was actually kind enough to have included

Claugh's profile within the documents.

The death god of battlefields.

A demon who has never lost on a battlefield.

With an overwhelming fighting prowess, and a talent in deploying troops.

Against such an opponent,

"What can I do?"

Somehow, he felt like running away.

"Ah geez, I just keep getting into such bothersome stuff."

But, was it actually God's grace that his opponent wasn't Luke? He thought.

If it were Luke marshaling the army, the Ryner now, might not be a match for him.

If such a person, who possesses a level-head beyond ordinary, were to take command of the troops, with the current state of Ryner now, it wasn't even funny to begin with.

Of course, Ryner had actually studied battle tactics and strategies for use in battlefields before, if he had to be honest with himself, it was a one-man battling..... in other words, the training was targeted to build him into a one-man army.

"So as to speak, well, it would be highly suspicious if I could actually beat that guy from those kind of training....."

He said with a weak voice, and then,

"..... but if I actually encounter him on the battlefield, I can't let myself be killed either..... then, is that the only way? I must suddenly acquire the ability to surpass him in thinking, that's the only way right? That kind of development? Uwah, that's impossible right?"

He was already overwhelmed with despair.

The excessive bothers of life made him want to sigh out.

“.....”

At that moment, Ryner glanced at the needles of the clock and realized that it was already past five.

“..... oops.”

While thinking all those weird thoughts and making considerations, without knowing, he had already spent more than an hour.

Even though it was time for the morning sun to rise soon, due to the seemingly bad weather, the sky outside was still dark. That was why the time had passed without him realizing it.

“It’s time to move.”

He hurriedly stood up. Left the room, and climbed down the stairs. As he stepped out of the building, he looked up at the dark sky which was overcast with clouds, and thought that it did seem like it was going to rain today.

“..... geez, and it was such a long-awaited morning for us to embark on our journey. A bad omen eh.”

As he said that, without really thinking much into it despite what he just said, he started off running.

Along the way, he thought of taking a detour to a library, and borrow some books on battle tactics and strategies, but in the end gave up on that thought. Since he knew not when he would be able to return those books after leaving the country, and more importantly, he did not want to find out what Ferris was going to do to him for being late because of that detour.

And then, in order not to be late and have Ferris waiting, he increased his pace.

♦

The time now shifts back to a while ago.

It was already time to set off if she didn’t want to arrive late at the designated place to link up with Ryner.

“Darn. Looks like I might be late.”

Ferris was running along the merchant street.

She was carrying two knapsacks and a large pouch.

By the way, the knapsack on her left contained her clothes. It contained the cute clothes with the dango logo, which were bought from the previously mentioned apparel shop.

Currently, she was wearing the same type of clothes as well.

It was much more comfortable than her usual armor, and her feet felt lighter. Except that the sword hanging from her waist seemed a little out of place……

However, strangely, whatever she wore seemed to suit her beautifully.

And the knapsack on her right, as one would expect, contains Ryner's new clothes bought from the same apparel shop.

In the beginning, the shop assistant had made some suitable selections for her, except for one piece, which was actually an underwear that only a pervert would wear, that alone was chosen by Ferris.

At that time, the female shop assistant said,

"Ohh, that must be a present for your boyfriend! The two of you must be very close～"

Ferris then replied,

"Nope, it's the complete opposite in fact. This is something I'm giving him to shame him."

"Uwah, so you guys go for this kind of 'play'!?"

"…… 'play'? What are you talking about?"

"No, no, it's nothing. I see. Miss, for you to go on such level of offense, my most humble self feels absolutely touched. Then, what about this? I think this will look pretty good."

"Hoh. Then let's have that as well."

"How about this as well?"

"Then, that one as well."

In the end, the knapsack was filled with those pervy wear.

Perhaps, Ryner was really going to travel half-naked most of the time.

Half-naked, with pince-nez glasses.

She started imagining the look of despair on Ryner's face.

"..... Fufufu. I'm looking forward to it."

She laughed expressionlessly while running.

Well, actually she did buy a few pieces of normal clothing for Ryner, which was stowed into the large pouch, but that was a secret. She would make him go half-naked, and only reveal those to him at the very end when he started crying.

In any case.

With an incredible speed, she passed through the merchant street, and the residence area, and got onto the highway.

However, she got off the highway immediately.

Even though this path would lead straight to the rendezvous location, Asohld dango tea-house, she couldn't take that direct path.

Both yesterday and today, as she was going around the town, she saw groups of pursuers who were going round searching for Ryner.

Even though Ferris was not on the wanted list yet, which was why she had nobody coming after her, things might have changed by now.

Even if this wasn't so, if she was tailed, they would be able to get hold of Ryner's location, and this could become a bother.

That's why she got off the highway, and verified whether there was anybody following behind her.

".....mm. It seems okay."

On saying that, she started relaxing her pace a little.

From now on, she would be heading towards the meeting place without using the unobstructed highway, but before that.

"..... I'm pretty sure it's around this area."

She said.

Last night, she found Iris taking a stroll on the streets, and gave her some orders.

Tomorrow, Ferris would be embarking on a journey.

After Ferris and Ryner had gotten out of the country, once things cool down, Iris was supposed to bring Arua and Kuku along and follow behind them.

And tomorrow, before Ferris leaves, she is to prepare eight knapsacks of dango and pass them to her at somewhere a little off the highway leading northwards.

She was at that place where she's going to receive her dango,

"..... it should be around this area."

She halted as she said that.

She looked around her surroundings.

It was different from the orderly highway, and even though it was just a small distance away from the main path, it looked as if this was already a complete wilderness area.

The area had a dense growth of wild grass that was even taller than Ferris, and it was an area which was difficult to walk through.

That's why she intended to head to the rendezvous point through these grass to avoid discovery by any pursuers.

"..... I can't seem to find Iris among all these thick grass."

She scanned her surroundings.

And searched for Iris's presence.

But nothing.

"Iris, are you here?"

She called out, but as she thought,

“……”

There was no reply.

“…… hm. She hasn’t arrived yet?”

She pushed through the grass and moved further up.

“Iris, are you here?”

Then, from among the grass,

“Nee-sama!”

Iris called out.

Ferris turned her head in that direction.

And saw her sister. Iris was there within the grass.

With blond hair resembling that of Ferris, and fair smooth skin. While she had a childish face, her features were unbelievably perfect. She was wearing a dress with lots of frills, and on her back was a small red backpack, her usual outfit.

That Iris,

“……”

Iris was covered in blood, and hanging upside down with her feet grabbed.

Both her hands and feet were bounded as well.

“…… nee-sama, don’t come!”

Iris cried out with a face that looked like she was about to cry.

And Ferris.

“……”

Ferris saw the man who was grabbing her feet.

With long flowing, pitch-black hair, and cold deep blue eyes.

And the man bore a dark smile resembling that of a devil.

That man was familiar to Ferris.

If I remember correctly, he is called Froaude……

But, why is he here.

Why did Iris have those eyes.

Why.

What in the world……

"…… bastard, what the hell did you do to Iris, ehhhhhhhhhhh!"

She drew her sword. And advanced towards Froaude with an unbelievable speed.

It was a speed that could not be followed by the naked eye.

One could say that it's god speed.

There was no normal human being who would be able to stop her sword.

However, Froaude just carried a dark smile.

"…… you drew a sword in a frenzy…… A foolish thing to do. You should know very well that you can't beat me alone."

And he waved his hand. His right hand which was adorned with a black ring.

And he murmured softly.

"…… let there, be darkness."

In an flash.

The shadow of Froaude on the ground expanded and became distorted.

And out came shadow beasts, flying out from the shadow.

Black-colored monsters that looked like wolves.

One of them flew towards Ferris.

“Ku.”

She swung her sword at it.

But she didn’t cut it down.

The wolf, with its sharp teeth, bit on her sword and stopped it.

Froaude shrugged his shoulders.

“Oops, seems like you’ve gotten weaker since the time we met? The you from before would have been able to readily cut down one or two of those **Kagerou (Shadow Wolves)**..... or is it that you have become flustered from this?”

As he said that, he raised his left hand.

The left hand that was grabbing Iris.

Iris was crying. Since young, she had hardly shown any tears and was perpetually smiling, showing expressions which Ferris was sometimes envious of, that very sister of hers was sniffing and sobbing right now.

“..... bastard.”

Ferris withdrew her sword once, took a step backwards, and swung. Her swing was sharper and faster than before.

The two wolves were sliced apart and disappeared.

But the next bunch of shadows had already appeared. Three of those wolves were circling Iris and Froaude.

“.....”

Ferris stared at them and concentrated.

If she let her guard down, she would be killed.

This fella. The shadows created by this fella were abnormally strong.

The first time when she fought this guy, she couldn’t touch him at all. At that time, Ryner was with her, and after finding his weakness they managed to drive him off, now, could she rescue Iris from his hands all by herself?

“.....”

It would be difficult, she thought.

But it was not impossible, she felt.

Since that time, her skills had gone up a another notch.

Furthermore, she was aware that the shadows were conjured using that black ring he was wearing.

In the space after she cut down all the shadows, she shall slice off that finger where the ring was adorned.

“..... no.”

At that moment, she looked at the bloody form of Iris. Her forehead was cut, shoulders too, legs too..... and more seriously, there was blood dripping from her back..

She understood just by looking at that. Froaude was toying with Iris while she tried to escape. Her back must be ridden with bite wounds from the shadow wolves.

Iris shook in fear. Ferris had never seen her sister with such an expression.

Her sister. Someone whom she has cherished dearly since young,

“.....”

This was not the end.

Ferris thought.

His arm.

She shall sever that arm with the ring.

She adopted a low sword stance. She steeled her nerves, and brought forth the highest amount of concentration towards the tip of her sword.

At that moment, Iris yelled.

“Don’t! Nee-sama, don’t!”

“.....”

“You have to get out of here. This guy is incredibly strong beyond what we’ve ever se.....”

Ferris interrupted her mid-sentence and said.

“..... I’ve seen it before. That’s why there is no need to worry. I’m coming to rescue you in a second.”

Froaude laughed again.

“What beautiful sisterly love..... is that what I should say? But all that is a foolish struggle.”

“.....”

Ferris did not answer. She focused all her strength towards the tip, one single point, of her sword.

Froaude continued.

“..... as I thought, you alone don’t pose much of a threat to me. You drew your sword in a frenzy, and chose to fight a battle in which you have no chance of winning..... Ryner-san wouldn’t do such a thing right?”

“.....”

She did not answer. *A chance of winning does exist. This guy is making light of me, if he thinks I’m the same as before, I shall let him taste pain.*

In a flash, I will cut off that arm and wipe that smirk off your face.

She thought.

And her preparations were complete.

At that moment, Froaude said.

“Now, withdraw your sword and stand down. I don’t really enjoy wasting unnecessary time on such trivialities.....”

And at that moment.

“Then, I shall put an end to your time here.”

Ferris's body launched forward.

And that was at a speed many times faster than before.

The shadow wolves reacted and closed in on her, but she started cutting them down immediately.

One.

On top of that, another two of them attacked her simultaneously, one of which she dodged, and the other she cut down and continued advancing forward.

The one she had dodged was once again coming after her from behind, but she ignored that.

It was fine as long as it couldn't catch up.

Advancing more swiftly, swinging more sharply.

And without getting caught by the enemy's attacks, taking aim at Froaude's arm.....

"....."

Sharply, swiftly.

Delivering the sword blow to his arm.

In an instant.

"..... gah."

That muffled cry came from Ferris instead.

The sword never reached Froaude.

A giant black snake appeared from the shadow below Froaude and bit into her right leg.

With razor sharp teeth, it was biting deep into her thigh.

Because of that sudden intense pain, the movement of her sword became dull.

At the same time, from behind her, the wolf bit into her left arm.

"....."

Her face twisted in agony, unable to make a sound from the agonizing pain.

But still, even so, she didn't stop.

With her sword arm still free, and her left leg which was unhindered, she took a stride forward, and slashed at Froaude……

That man who was wearing a thin, evil smile before all this was slightly taken aback,

"…… you nearly got me. If you continue to move in that state though, your limbs might get torn off."

But Ferris did not mind. She only glared at the man in front of her,

"…… I'll kill you."

"But, you can't do it."

He shook his ring. As he did that, another snake came out of the shadow and bit her left leg.

"Nee-sama!?"

Iris cried out.

But, she could not respond to that. Another shadow wolf flew out of the shadow and bit into her remaining free right arm.

"……"

A tearing sound was heard, and blood started spurting out.

At that instant, she almost lost consciousness from the intense pain.

Her sword seemed about to fall to the ground.

But she shook her head, and was determined to endure the pain. If she passed out here, she wouldn't be able to save Iris.

"…… ku."

She raised her arm.

To cut off Froaude's head……

With slow movements, she raised her sword arm.

And Iris began,

"..... please don't..... it's enough! It's enough so please stop moving Nee-sama!"

She hollered.

But Ferris only smiled faintly at her. *I'll be fine, so don't make such a worried face*, she seemed to say. *When have you ever seen Nee-sama lose to anyone before? Never, isn't it? It's going to be alright this time round as well, so just wait there*, she wanted to say.

But, no sound came from her. Her strength started ebbing away from her, from the arm that was attempting to raise her sword.....

Iris was crying. With tears flowing, she screamed in a shaking voice.

"Please, please stop. If you continue to move..... your arm..... Nee-sama's arm would be to....."

Her arm, would be torn into pieces.

She knew that of course. But, she still tried to raise her arm. Somehow, she had to save Iris.....

But, at that moment, Froaude hoisted Iris up,

"Do you really want to save her so much? Then, I shall first....."

At that moment, he started waving the hand with the ring.

"..... let there....."

He intended to kill her.

He intended to kill Iris.

In order to stop him, Ferris tried lifting her arm. Gripping her sword, lifting her arm. But, she failed. Her arm did not move.

What should I do?

What can I do?

"....."

But there was nothing she could do.

"..... no."

Someone.

Someone save us.

She yelled from her heart.

Please, someone save us.

Someone!?

"....."

While she was wishing for that, an unbelievable thing happened.

It was if her prayers were answered.

From the edge of her sight, she could see a lone man running on the highway.

That was a man she knew well.

Always having a sleepy look.

Always unmotivated.

Languidly passing everyday, but at times, this sort of thing does happen.

At the time when she wished for.

At the time when she wished to be rescued, for some reason, he appeared near her, and towards here.....

Towards here.....

"..... Ry, Ryner."

She tried saying.

Calling out his name.

Calling out the name of her partner.

"....."

However.

Before she could do that, Froaude had already covered her mouth with his hand.

"..... oops..... I can't allow that. I've gone out of the way, doing my best, to secure Ryner-san's weakness, if we let him see us in this situation, it might become problematic. He, unlike you, might be troublesome to deal with....."

Despite her attempts, Ferris could not move her mouth against the force exerted from that delicate hand.

Froaude continued.

"..... that's right. Even if both of you are here, I'm still confident of my victory. But yet, if he interferes, he could turn things around. Even though his strength should be at the same level as yours, but if you join forces with him, there is a chance that I could be defeated. Inexplicable right? If he uses you, a clear advantageous situation to turn things around could be created. It's like as if he is cloaked in some strange magic..... is it because he is the man known as **The Greatest Magician of Roland**?"

But she didn't hear anything he said.

She could only gaze after Ryner's figure.

The figure of Ryner that was getting further and further away.

Idiot, why didn't you turn around, Ferris thought. *I'm right here, why didn't you turn around and look this way*, she thought.

"....."

But Ryner seemed to be running with a furor that he'd never had, and had not noticed any of the ongoings close by.

And she was well aware of why he was running so furiously. In order not to be late for the rendezvous. In order not to let Ferris

wait, that was why he was running so furiously.

“.....”

She gazed at that.

That was the only thing she could do.

After Ryner disappeared into the distance, Froaude removed his hand.

“..... for a moment, you saw a foolish dream, didn’t you? Thinking that there might still be a way out of this.”

He said in a delightful voice.

Ferris lifted her head and glared at Froaude.

“..... I’ll definitely kill you later.”

“Haha.”

“..... Ryner will come. After seeing..... after seeing the state we are in, he won’t keep quiet about it.”

“He’s already long gone.”

“Even so, he’ll come. You..... you’re going to be killed.....”

At those words, Froaude, with a jubilant smile, said.

“Ooh. That’s scary. But he won’t be able to kill me. Because you..... you will become a hindrance to him.....”

He waved his hand again and continued.

“In order to avoid wounding you, the magician shall fall. *Don’t take away my precious things*, he’ll shout out, and become incapable of using his magic. He is indeed someone with an intelligent and lucid mind, and can be an unusually tough opponent to fight..... but still, he is trash who should not be a source of distress to my master.”

He lifted his hand with the black ring.

“..... when friends are captured, his heart wavers. When friends are wounded, he becomes unable to advance forward. When friends are killed..... he weeps. That weakness is the problem, isn’t it? Weak.

Too weak. That level of trash..... my master.....”

And he said.

“He is not worthy of being the friend of Hero King Sion Astal.”

To those words.

Ferris, for an instant, did not comprehend them at all.

Her mind went blank from the incomprehension.

What did this guy just say?

This guy.

“..... don’t tell me..... don’t tell me that Sion..... Sion is your.....”

Froaude answered promptly.

“..... this is also on his orders.”

And he waved his hand.

He drew an arc with the black ring.

As he did that, darkness.

At Froaude’s feet, the darkness expanded again and ten beasts appeared.

Iris was.....

“Wait, stop!!”

Ferris yelled.

She twisted her body, her limbs seemingly about to be torn apart, after enduring the intense pain from that,

“Stoppp!!”

Ferris hollered.

Pleadingly.

Seeking help.

Please save us.

Somone, please save us, she yelled.

But he did not stop.

The scene before her became increasingly dreadful.

“What is this……”

She was confused.

Unable to think of anything else, she was in a state of confusion.

“What the hell is happening here?”

Iris dying. Being killed. And the orders were from Sion.

What’s this.

What the hell is this.

I don’t get it. What should I do?

What can I do?

She felt a strong sense of loneliness.

The world…… she felt that the world was a terrible place.

It was the same as that day.

That day from two weeks ago.

Ryner went missing all of a sudden, and Sion became weird.

It was a different world from what she knew before, as if it had undergone a complete transformation.

Unsettling, fearful, shivering everyday.

But all that should have ended.

It should already have ended.

Because she found him.

Because she found what she was looking for.

In that prison.

Her light --- that sleepy-headed languid-looking light, she should already have found that.

“Why..... why didn’t you come save me! Ryner! I’m right here! Come quickly!”

She screamed.

She screamed with desperation, attempting to send her calls to the already distant Ryner.

“Come save us, Ryner!!”

However.

What was reflected in her eyes was not light, but darkness.

Froaude laughed.

His thin devilish red lips, parted widely.

“.....”

In that instant.

Ferris gave off a throat-tearing shriek.

♦

Somewhat north of that location, at the place known as Asohld dango tea-house.

Ryner was waiting alone.

As it was still early, the shop was still closed. If it were the dango god Ferris, she might have gotten the shop to open, but as for him, he couldn’t do anything about it.

"..... no place to sit."

Speaking in a moronic voice, he turned his head around.

The time now should be eight-thirty.

Somehow, he managed to reach the place five minutes before the appointed time, *a~h, now she won't be able to complain about anything*, was what he thought, but now it was already way past thirty minutes from the appointed time.

"..... that gal, hurry up and get here....."

He gave a knock to his tired waist. Then stretched himself, and bent himself all the way backwards.

That was all he did.

There was nothing else to do.

It seemed like Ferris still had not arrived yet.

"..... did I make a mistake with the time?"

He recalled his conversation with Ferris the morning before, and verified that the appointed time was indeed eight.

Then, why isn't she here yet?

Don't tell me something had.....

"....."

At that moment.

Drops of water fell onto his face.

"Huh?"

He looked up into the sky and the sky was already completely dark.

Drops of water just kept falling.

"..... woah, this is the worst."

Ryner frantically tried to take shelter at the edge of the eaves of the shop.

"..... geez, spare me please..... we are going to embark on a journey hereon. At the very least, give us a pleasant weather when we set off eh?"

Even though he said that, his wishes were unanswered and the rain just got increasingly heavier.

Ryner sighed softly and looked in the direction of the highway again.

The ground was wet from the falling rain.

Ryner continued looking in that direction.

The rain looked like it was going get even heavier. It might be quite tiresome to leave the country today. After Ferris arrives, he plans to find a place to put up at until the rain stops before moving out again.

"....."

While pondering, he absentmindedly gazed at the scenery before him, which had its visibility distance gradually reduced due to the rain.

Ferris should be here by now, but yet there was no sign of her.

Lightning flashed across the sky.

The rain got even heavier.

He looked at the sky, *is this for real*, he thought, letting out another sigh.

To walk through this rain would be tough.

He looked at the highway again. In the direction of Roland's capital.

With his sight set in the direction where Ferris should be coming from, he said.

"..... she'll be kind of pitiful if she's totally drenched."

The sky flashed again, followed by a thundering boom.

It was if the sky was mad about something.

And at that moment.

“..... yner!”

He seemed to hear a voice from afar.

Because of the rain, it was pretty much obscured.

“..... Ryner.”

He could hear it this time.

His name was been called.

“..... finally the princess has arrived?”

As he said that, he looked at the highway. But, there was no Ferris.

But still, once again.

“..... Ryner-tteba!” [12]

He was called.

But that voice, instead of coming from the south, was coming from the north.

“Eh?”

Ryner turned around.

Standing there, was not Ferris --- but another girl.

In the heavy downpour.

Was the smiling face of a girl.

Even though she was smiling, for some reason, she looked like she was about to cry at the same time.

Looking at that girl, Ryner, with a surprised voice, said.

“..... Kiefer.”

And,

Kiefer came running towards here.

“.....”

And embraced Ryner tightly.

Afterword

Thus, this is the new series.

In other words, there will also be first time readers.

That's why I'll say it. To those who are reading this afterword, I'll say that brazenly.

"First time readers, hello. Second time and up readers, it's been a while."

Something like that! Things like that are not unusual right?

And at last, I've also said it.

After over thirty books, I've finally gone and said it!!

Just like an author.

Like an author right!

Having published over thirty books, I've wondered about declaring something like 'just like an author' though (LOL).

Well, enough with the ramblings, so how was "Dai Densetsu no Yuusha no Densetsu 1"?

By the way, for the benefit of those reading this for the first time, I'll explain a little.

Those who have read the opening 4-koma should already be aware of this, this particular work is a continuation of the previous series "Densetsu no Yuusha no Densetsu 1 ~ 11".

But, there is no need to read the previous series!

The reason is because, after reading the 4-koma in front, it will allow you to transit smoothly to the start of this volume.

Probably! (Probably, you say!?)

Should be the case! (Should be the case, you say!?)

Frankly speaking, as I'm writing this afterword, I don't really know how the 4-koma is progressing.

Well, how the story went will be covered and explained in the 4-koma, since, quite some time ago, when I was having a conversation with my project editor M-san,

"Since you've come this far to start on the second series, let's do a summary for the first-time readers!!"

So we had quite a discussion on it. And the plan has headed towards that direction.

But yet, M-san came announcing something shocking.

"Kagami-kun, you know."

"What is it?"

"I've a little 'coming out' relevation."

"Eh? Coming out?"

"Yeah."

"Is, is it that? *The truth is that I'm gay, I like you, Kagami-kun!* If that's what you want to say, I completey can't accept it, you know?"

"Ah haha ~. I'll kill you, you know?"

"I'm relieved to hear that."

"Well, jokes aside, anyway."

"Anyway."

"You know."

"Yeah."

"Didn't I say to put a summary in Dai Denyuuden?"

"You sure did."

"But, I've always found those 'previous volume summary' to be a bother to read, and have never once read them."

"And you are making this shocking revelation just two months

before the release date!!”

“I am.”

“No, even if you say that.”

“Still, is Kagami-kun the type who reads summaries?”

“No, not at all.”

“You see!!”

“Even if you say that..... then, what shall we do?”

“What shall we do indeed.”

“You didn’t even think about it!”

After going in circles, at a loss to what we should do, in the end, we still want to add in a summary that’s easy to comprehend for the readers to enjoy this volume properly. As we're caught in our own passion, the plan of summarizing each volume with one 4-koma was sprung.

Initially, there was also the idea of me writing a summary of each volume to turn it into a drawing, for making it into a picture book form, but this was what I said to that:

“No, I will read anything but picture books.”

“Say, Kagami-kun, why are you so proud in saying that?”

And then the idea of a picture book was discarded.

“Isn’t it easier to read 4-koma, and for everyone to understand the summary smoothly without boring them?”

And that’s how M-san came up with the excellent idea.

And then, with regards to making the summary story for the 4-koma,

“It’s tough to get the author himself to make a summary of his own work; so I can’t make you do it. I can’t make you do it, you know! Say, leave it to me! I will do everything ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

The super capable resourceful project editor who's as sweet as candy, M-san, shouted to his author, and so M-san had worked hard on the 4-koma summary this time!

By the way, to talk about how hard the illustrator Toyota-san had worked, at that time, she should have been working hard like a corpse.[13]

So how was the 4-koma that was a result of all this?

Beyond tears, laughter, and being touched, it is a peerless 4-koma that can help you understand everything about the previous series!

It's definitely an awesome piece of work, isn't it! Ahh, what an awesome piece of work!

Right! Though I've yet to see it, I believe it's definitely a stupendous piece of work!

(So to speak, I'm giving a great deal of pressure to my project editor M-san, who should be polishing up the story from hereon. (LOL))

So how was the new series that everyone had worked hard to put out?

The story starts immediately after volume 11 of Denyuuden.

Even though it starts immediately after Denyuuden, yet, it's a completely different story.

Firstly, the concept is different, but that in itself should be enjoyable.

As everything about the situation around Ryner, Ferris, and Sion has changed; the real story starts.

What has occurred up till now was merely the prologue, so the world from this volume onwards is going to expand, and in one breath, it's going to rapidly build up to the climax, that's the kind of story it is.

More than ever, as I'll work hard to let everyone enjoy the story, please continue to take care of me.

And then!

For the new readers who started with this volume, if this volume proves interesting, please do certainly try reading the previous series.

For those who have already read up till here, how about trying to re-read the previous series again?

And then, for the sake of the NEW readers as well as those who would go back to re-read the previous series! What a thing!

In line with the start of this second series, the previous series “Densetsu no Yuusha no Densetsu 1～11” will start selling with completely new covers!!

Different from all the other previously published works of Fujimi, Denyuuden gets a personal design, and on top of that, Toyota-san will draw new illustrations for every volume! (Really, thanks for your hard work, Toyota-san!)

Since, I guess this book will be lined up in bookstores during its launch date, please do go take a look at a large bookstore.

But, there will not be that many copies available, yet. So, I’m wondering whether it will be hard to get hold of a copy. If that happens, please do make an order with the bookstore, or the publishing house. If the orders accumulate it might grab the attention of Fujimi and they just might increase the number of circulating copies, making it seemingly easier to get hold of one.

By the way, I got a first-hand sample of a drawing of Ryner for this volume and it was awesomely cool!

Toyota-san must have vomitted blood as she was drawing, I think.

“What kind of work are you making me do, project editor M-san, dieeeeeeeeeeeeeee.”

She’d yelled as she drew, I guess.

By the way, at that moment, I’d also,

“What’s with this schedule? Do you want to kill me?? damnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn M!”

As I go on spewing blood.

At that point, as expected, the kind M-san who’s as sweet as candy

towards authors.

With a desire to see our dead bodies, he'd say.

"Fuhihihihihihihi. Die! Die! Die! Work until you die~"

Something like this, you know ☆

Frightening.

Ah ~ seems frightening.

Despite being M-san, he's an S.

Well, about 70% are lies. We're on very good terms as we work on the project. (No, it's true, we really get along! (LOL))

So then, I guess this is enough explanation regarding this piece of work.

If you want to know more about Denyuuden, read the afterword of "Denyuuden 1", and you'll understand how the events of this piece of work began.

As I wrote until now, I gently took out volume 1 for a look.

As I read my own afterword when I first began this project, I was like so embarrassed that my face turned red!

That's right! This piece of work had won the Dragon Cup award! (Did you even forget that!)

After continuing for such a long time, and garnering so much support, to be honest, I had not thought that this would happen and was surprised.

And whatever happened here and there, it's thanks to everyone's support that I've been able to carry on up till now.

Indeed, without you readers, this piece of work could not possibly have continued for so long. Rather than me creating this piece of work as an author, I've actually created this together with the readers. That's why even though it's the same old line I've always said, this time round, indeed, I still want to say, thank you.

I love you allllllll

gone and said such an embarrassing thing.

That was nasty of me, since I really love everyone of you.

In truth, since this is the afterword, I really want to write something cool, and not something that sounds stupid, but still, since I think this is the most important part, ahh, as expected, it's becoming embarrassing, so let's forget it (LOL).

But, if there are people who, while reading my work, can forget something unpleasant or something painful even for just a moment, I'll be glad.

Since everyone else has been supporting me, I also want to write this story for it to become a support for everyone else.

And this new series will become such a story.

A story of being able to stand up, despite how everything in the world is messed up.

It'd be good if I have written it well, though.

I'll do my best to write it. So, thanks for the support.

And, after all that, it's time to report on my recent situation.

The truth is, I'm currently playing around with bicycles.

Mountain bike, foldable bike, BMX and such, I've been modifying and practicing with them.

And then I told the project editor,

"Let me write a column on bicycles!"

And this was the candy-like reply I got.

"Huh!? What about the manuscript! I'll kill you, damn you."

"I, I, I'm sorry."

The path to a bicycle column is still a long way.

Further on to the next topic.

My residence and workplace are in separate places. Together with other authors, we rented a working place, and that's where I work. This is kind of tough. Dying, dying from the writing and wanting to stop, someone beside me said:

"Damn you, what are you resting for!? In spite of me racking my brains and writing, what are you resting for!"

"That, that, that's because you came lateeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee! I'm the earliest here, you know! I'm already at my limits!"

"It has nothing to do with coming late or early. It's about efficiency."

At that moment, the third person who arrived awfully late,

"Good morning!"

"It's no longer morninggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggg."

That is how savage the place is.

Now, which of the three people is me?

The hint is that I'm always the latest. (Eh!)

Well, I'm not always like that. I also have my calm moments, during which I work hard and I almost seemingly died.

And today, I'm working hard as well. Despite pulling an all-nighter playing yesterday, I'm working hard. (No, you are working hard at that?)

But, from hereon, there will be an awesome battle in front of me. So, I guess my afterword will end around here.

By the way, as to what that awesome battle is...

"Alright. I've finished writing my afterword, so I'm going back for today."

"Damn you, didn't you just come here awhile agooooooooooooooooooooo!?!"

That's the battle.....

Erm, well, with this and that, it's time to part for today.

Even though it seems like I'm fooling around with this afterword, but I'm basically a corpse working hard on writing this, hoping to quickly deliver this piece of work to your hands!

And with that!

Next month, around November 20, Dai Denyuuden 2 will be launching, so please look forward to it!

On - top - of - that.

In December, a continuation of "Toriaezu Densetsu no Yuusha no Densetsu 1～11", "Denyuuden SHOW 1" will be released. Do look after me with regards to that as well!!

And,

I just realized this as I'm making the announcements.

Isn'ttttttttttttttttttttttt the next publication of the series coming out in March againnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn?, I shouted as I left.

I ran away from my workplace.

Well, well. After this and that, the next time we meet shall be in next month's afterword!

See you.

Kagami Takaya

"Alright. I've finished the afterword....."

"You can't go back."

"Ehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh."

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Pochi & Blackie:** They are common dog names (Pochi & Kuro).
2. ↑ **Tarou & Jirou:** They are old-fashioned guys' names. They mean something like First Lad (Tarou), Second Lad (Jirou).
3. ↑ **Ferris's Pun-ishment:** Ferris employs a dajare (ie. pun). Original sentence: 一ヶ月はみたらしだんごのみたらしダレ抜きの刑だ！！！ (Ikkagetsu wa mitarashi dango no mitarashi dare nuki no kei da!!!) This is how the original romanized sentence looks like with literal translations in parentheses: Ikkagetsu (One month) wa (topic particle) mitarashi dango (a type of dango dipped in a syrup made from soy sauce, sugar and starch) no ('s indicating possession of the next noun) mitarashi (purifying; to be exact this means a bowl of purifying water for shrine use, but contextually here it can be seen as adj-noun) dare (in this context, it's a contraction of darake, meaning lazy) nuki (to pull out, remove) no ('s indicating possession of the next noun) kei (penalty, punishment, sentence) da (is / be). Not perfect, but that's how the translation ended up as it is. In case it's still not obvious, the pun word is "mitarashi".
4. ↑ **Snow Joke:**What Ryner meant was that the likelihood of him getting pumped up was as low as the likelihood of snow falling tomorrow (contextually inferred to be impossible); hence he made the joke that it's going to snow tomorrow since he's getting pumped up here.
5. ↑ **Ahotaare:** Ahotaare is derived from Sion's original family Astal, which is romanized as Asutaaru. "Aho" (あほ, アホ, 阿呆) refers to idiot and is a word originating from Kansai dialect.
6. ↑ **Oyaji:** Oyaji (親父), in this particular context means boss of an establishment. In other contexts, it could mean father or old man. It's less cumbersome to use Oyaji than to keep using shopkeeper or shop owner in Ryner and Ferris's dialogue (since this is used in the novel as well).
7. ↑ **Mitsuan-Dango:** Literally means "honey red bean paste dango".
8. ↑ **Zashiki:** Zashiki (座敷) is a type of Japanese styled room with tatami flooring.

9. ↑ **Ocha:** Ocha (お茶) means tea in Japanese but in the Japanese context, usually by default it refers to Japanese green tea.
10. ↑ **Shin:** The kanji for God (神 - normally pronounced as "Kami") can also be pronounced as "Shin". Similarly the kanji for truth (真), can also be pronounced as "Shin".
11. ↑ **Outstretched Arms:** A figurative form of speech, meaning Ryner doesn't have the power to reach Sion yet.
12. ↑ **tteba:** A particle which in this context, indicates emotional closeness.
13. ↑ **Working hard like a corpse:** A figurative form of speech, meaning the person is working so hard, lacking sleep probably, that he's like a zombie / corpse.

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